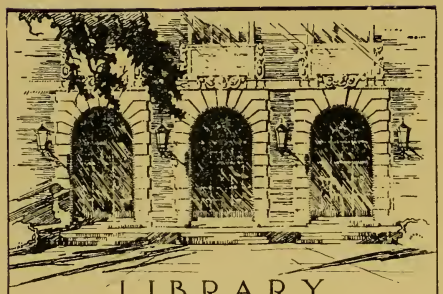
THE MONKS OF THELEMA



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THE MONKS OF THELEMA.

CHAPTER I.

"Friendship is constant in all other things
Save in the office and affairs of love."

Alan mused over Desdemona's advice for the whole of the next week. His solitary work in the fields made him introspective, and he was beginning to find out reasons for his failure in the defects of his own character. His great defect, of which he was unconscious, was that he lacked that *bonhomie* which is infectious, and spreads from man to man, like a ball which is caught up and thrown from hand to hand. He was a grave man, and to the rustics he appeared as a schoolmaster or as a clergyman, always preaching unpleasant things, to which one had to listen.

When one of them emerged from the

Spotted Lion, after a simple half-pint, it was painful to him, especially if he were a rustic of sensitive disposition, to encounter the deep sad eyes and grave face of the Squire. Had Alan been able to meet that backslider with a hearty round of abuse by way of admonition, something might have been effected. But as the case stood to the village, here was the seigneur of the village come down from his high estate, without any apparent motive except that of meddlesomeness, working among them and for them, dressed as one of themselves, leading, the saintliest of lives, more laborious in the field than themselves, more abstinent than any baby : the thing was from the very first disagreeable, and it became in the course of months a matter of profound resentment.

Alan knew that he was personally unpopular among the people, which he attributed to his unfortunate inability "to enter into their minds"; and as has been seen, he did not scorn to seek advice from his friends. There was a general assent among them that it was no use working all day in the fields if none of the men liked to work with him ; that the

profession of temperance, if no one followed the example, was foolish ; and that it was a pity to keep on inviting people to be taught who preferred to remain ignorant, or to wash themselves when they preferred the ancient unwashedness.

From that point they diverged. The Vicar stuck to the principle that men want officers and orders—not superior comrades. Miranda thought that the men should have their wages on the condition of night-school, which was a woman's way of looking at things. Mr. Rondelet, clinging to his new views, invited Alan to give up the whole thing, and leave swine who liked wallowing, to wallow ; "only," he said, "let them have separate sties, a long way from us." And Tom Caledon said that to him it was foolishness ; that gentlemen should live with gentlemen ; and that in this realm of England people who have the pluck to rise can rise, and even run their sons for the prizes of social position.

And while he was in this dubiety, and while the cold feeling, which damps all enthusiasm, was beginning to creep over him that he might be making himself ridiculous, and sa-

crificing youth, wealth, and ease for the sake of making rustics snigger, there came this hint from Desdemona, that with the aid of a wife he might at least do something with the children. Of late, he confessed to himself with sorrow, he had felt strange yearnings for the old manner of life; and there were moments when there flashed across his mind visions splendid and beautiful, in which Miranda was chatelaine of Weyland Court. But to marry: to have a wife who would share in his aims, and strive to realise his ideas:—but then he thought that for such a wife he must look in the class among whom his labour was to lie. No lady could do what he wanted her to do: a lady, indeed, would fail for the same reason and in the same way that he had failed. His wife must be of the lower class by birth; she must represent their virtues, and be cognisant, by experience, of their failings; she must be able to reveal their sympathies, and show him the avenues by which to reach their hearts. As for the farm-work, he would give that up as useless. The evenings of mental prostration after a hard day of pitchforking were a proof that

labour of that kind was useless; and by learning his way to the affections of the people by changing their sentiments towards him so that they should no longer shuffle out of his path, he would be of far greater use than by merely going through the form of companionship in labour.

Whom to marry? He was not a man with a roving eye which lights on beauty here and beauty there. Quite the contrary; he thought very little of beauty—much less than most young men, whose thoughts, I believe, run a good deal on pretty faces: when he did think of beauty at all it was to illustrate the topic with the face of Miranda. Yet it occurred to him at once that the young woman must be comely. Prudence Driver, for instance, who quite sympathised with his views, was out of the question by reason of her unfortunate figure, which was a little twisted. Who, then? But that was a matter of detail, and it would wait. Meantime, he would go over to the Hall, and see Miranda.

Fortunately, Desdemona was with her.

"I have been thinking over what you suggested, Desdemona," he said, calmly.

"What was that?"

"About having a wife."

"The man speaks as calmly as if he were going to buy a horse," said Desdemona.

"The more I think of it, the more I like the idea," Alan went on.

"It is an idea," replied Desdemona, "which has commended itself to all your ancestors; in fact it is with you an hereditary idea—almost a family trait."

"We men lack insight," he said, gravely. "We do our best, but women surpass us in that sympathetic power of vision which pierces the most rugged shell of selfishness and rudeness. You are quite right; I must have a wife, and I want your advice."

"For such a sensible resolve as that, Alan, I will give you as much advice as you can carry away. But had you not better begin by falling in love?"

"Oh! no, not at all. That is not what I mean."

"But you *must*, Alan," Desdemona gasped. "Was it a dream? Or what *did* he mean?" Miranda looked perplexed and pained.

"No; I am not at all likely to fall in love

with the person I marry. Esteem and respect, of course, she will look for."

"But, Alan, what is the meaning? we do not understand you."

"I mean that my wife, in order to be the helpmeet that I want, must belong to the lower classes, the very lowest——"

"Good heavens!" cried Desdemona, "Is the man going to marry a housemaid?"

"Not a housemaid necessarily; though why not? However, I want to find some poor man's daughter who will understand her class, and help me to enter into their minds."

"My poor Alan," said Desdemona, "they haven't got any minds. I am sure they haven't."

She smiled from the superiority of her knowledge.

"Will you, however, you two friends and allies of mine, the closest and the best, help me to find such a girl?"

It was Miranda who made answer. Her face had gone suddenly pale, and there was a strange light in her eyes.

"I will help you," she said, "in everything. If you think this is the wisest thing for you,

you will only tell me what I am to do in order to help you."

"I do not think I can promise, Alan," said Desdemona, slowly. "This is a very serious step which you propose. And I must think of Lord Alwyne."

"You see now," said Alan, "why there need be no question of love."

"But marriage without love? Ah! Alan, you do not know, you cannot guess what that will be."

"No, Alan," said Miranda. "I should not like you to fall in love with a girl of that class. Of course it is impossible."

She spoke with the noble scorn which always seizes a demoiselle at the mere mention of the possibility of a gentleman falling in love with a maid of low degree. And yet she had read of King Cophetua, and the Earl of Burleigh, and Cinderella, and Griselda, and many other cases. Young ladies, indeed, seldom fall in love with the sons of gardeners. Pauline and Claude Melnotte do not form a case in point, because poor Pauline was grossly deceived. Therefore they argue that the reverse case is impossible. They should put a

few confidential questions to the shop girls, who might surprise them. But, perhaps, on the whole, they had better not.

"We must not think of love," Miranda repeated. "But you must look for something. Ideas you will not get, nor companionship."

"Not at first. But women are receptive. Companionship will come. For the first thing. I want great power of sympathy."

"Cannot Prudence Driver do what you want without—— ?" Miranda could not bring herself to frame the word.

Alan shook his head.

"No," he replied. "She will not do. I want a wife. It is only by the constant companionship of mind with mind that I can hope to bridge over the gulf between myself and my villagers."

"She ought to be pretty, too," Miranda went on. "I should not like to see you married to a perfectly common woman."

"You will not see me very often," he said, "after I am married I have to put my shoulder to the wheel, and I must not look back; nor regret the days of old."

There was a little bouquet of cut roses lying

on the table, which Miranda had brought in from the garden. Alan picked out a bud. "This is a beautiful bud, Miranda—wear it in your hair to-night. I will dine with the Order. It will not be many times more that you will see me among them."

"Oh! Alan." Miranda's eyes filled with tears. She was so stately to all the rest, and to him alone so womanly. "Alan, you will not desert me, will you? What would my life have been—what will it be—without you?"

Had there been in the enthusiast's eyes the slightest touch of softening, Desdemona would have swiftly and suddenly vanished from the room. But there was not. He did not look in her eyes, where love lay hiding, but visible to him, had not his heart been of stone. He was looking far away.

"I must not be tempted, Miranda, even by you. If I marry in the village I shall be tied for life to the village. One must not leave a young wife, even though she has red arms."

Miranda said nothing. The prospect thus suddenly opened was appalling to her.

There was silence, and presently Alan rose to go.

"We are to help you then, Alan," said the artful Desdemona; but if we are to render any real help you must promise not to act hastily, and without consulting us."

"I promise you," said Alan, "that I will marry no one without your approval. Does that content you, Miranda?"

"It ought to, Alan," she said, smiling rather wearily. "It is very good of you." And then he went away.

"We have got the power of veto, my dear," said Desdemona. "And we will exercise it."

Then she got up and shook her voluminous skirts.

"You GOOSE," she said, addressing no one by name. "Oh! you goose. All men here are geese; but you—oh! you are the most goosely GOOSE. Have you eyes? have you ears? have you understanding?"

"Desdemona dear!"

"Miranda, here is a house full of lively, accomplished, and sweet young ladies. And Alan is a rich, handsome, clever, and pleasant young man. That is all I mean, my dear child—that is all. And again and again I say—oh! you GOOSE! you GOOSE!"

CHAPTER II.

"Idalian Aphrodite beautiful,
Fresh as the foam new bathed in Paphian wells,
With rosy, slender fingers backward drew
From her warm brows and bosom, her deep hair
Ambrosial, golden, round her lucid throat."

"We must help him, Desdemona," said Miranda. Her cheek was grown suddenly pale, and there was a strange light of pain in her beautiful eyes, which she lifted heavily as she spoke. "We must help Alan in everything."

"Except in this, Miranda, which is suicide."

"It need not be——quite so bad as it seems."

"It is certain to be much worse than it seems, unless," Desdemona murmured, half to herself, "unless we can stop him in time."

"There must be, somewhere, if only one knew her," Miranda went on, "a girl who

would come up to poor Alan's ideal. I have shamefully neglected the poor people, Desdemona, and now this is my punishment."

"That is nonsense, my dear. It is true that you have not gone poking and prying into cottages, like some ladies. But as to neglect——!"

"She must be, first of all, a good-tempered girl. Good temper is such a very great thing."

"It depends," said Desdemona, "greatly on the size of the house. Of course, in a cottage good temper is everything. At Dalmeny Hall or the Abbey you might almost dispense with it. Some day I will write an essay on good temper, especially as required for the stage."

"Good temper, at all events," Miranda went on, "is almost an equivalent for good breeding among poor people."

"Unfortunately, it generally goes with stupidity," said Desdemona. "But that will be part of my essay."

"She must not be stupid. And she must have a soft voice. If possible she should have taste in dress. But I suppose we cannot hope for everything."

"A lady's-maid," said Desdemona, "would

perhaps be the nearest approach to Alan's ideal. Can you not spare him your own? And, oh! Miranda, to think that it was my own doing—mine—to put the notion into his dear, queer, cracked brain. What will Lord Alwyne say, when I tell him that it was my suggestion?"

It is not an easy thing to find a village girl possessed of those virtues which were thought by Miranda requisite for Alan's wife. Perhaps she looked for too much. Good temper: gentleness: the germs of good taste: modesty of deportment: refinement in personal habits: ready sympathy: quick wit: and some pretensions to good looks.

Miranda was not above the weakness of her class, which can seldom acknowledge beauty below a certain rank. Ladies would have said, for instance, and doubtless did say, of Nelson's Emma, that she was a person who might be called good-looking by some.—Could all these qualities be found united in one person? And where was that person?

"Let us, like Austria, claim the right to a veto," said Desdemona, "and then we can go

on exercising it for the next fifty years or so, until Alan is quite cured of this folly."

"Can we have a fête in the Park, and invite all the girls from Weyland and the villages round? Perhaps we shall be able to see some one who may be thought of."

This idea seemed promising, and Desdemona began to consider how such a fête could be organised.

First, she thought it might consist exclusively of the girls and young unmarried women of the country-side. True that in no rank of life would maidens look forward with rapture, or even complacency, to a gathering in which there were to be no young people of the opposite sex. That was a drawback. Yet Desdemona thought that by prolonging the festivities till late in the evening, a door would be opened, so to speak, for the young people of the opposite sex to meet the maidens, home returning, in the lanes. Desdemona, although cut to the heart to think of assisting at Alan's social suicide, was a kindly person, and thoughtful of her guests' happiness. Then, she thought, independently of the possibilities of a moonlight ramble home, each

sola cum solo, there would be a novelty in the exclusion of lovers, brothers, fathers, mothers, and babies. There should be no children. The youngest girl should be at least sixteen. Every girl in Weyland village and all the neighbouring hamlets within a radius of six miles should be invited to come, and bring with her every other girl of sixteen and upwards whom she might know.

And then the busy brain of the actress began to contrive means for making the thing into a pageant and a show. She took the Brothers and Sisters, one after the other, into consultation separately and together. Tom Caledon, who volunteered to do anything that was asked of him, except kiss-in-the-ring, thought that if the Brethren alone had to amuse these young persons, there might be jealousies. Nelly observed that if that was the arrangement proposed, she should feel it her duty to put on her habit and ride about as a mounted policeman all the day. Miranda was quite sure that the monks of Thelema might be safely trusted not to flirt with village girls. All the monks present became at once much graver of aspect than was at all natural

or usual with them; and Brother Peregrine, in a sepulchral voice, remarked that monks in all ages were notoriously above suspicion in that respect. Sister Cecilia changed the conversation by asking to be allowed the selection of the music. She was going to have nothing but old English tunes and songs, such as *Green Sleeves*, *Lillibullero*, and so on. The unappreciated novelist suggested a reading, and volunteered to devote the whole afternoon, if necessary, to readings from her own works. Other offers and suggestions were made, considered, and adopted or dropped, until the thing resolved itself into a grand series of entertainments designed to last the whole of the afternoon and evening.

The fête was fixed for a Saturday; it was to be held, if the weather proved fine, in that part of the park which lies between the Court and the little river Wey, which here winds its pretty course, and makes a great tongue of land, in which stand noble elms and sycamores, and where there is a goodly stretch of sloping grass. The grass, however, was covered with tents and marquees, and was gay with Venetian masts and bunting of every kind, so that

it was festive to look at. There were tents for everything, including a theatre and a concert room. The whole of the amusements except the band and the choir of boys, were personally provided by the members of the order, who were the hosts and hostesses. Only Miranda begged that there should be no waiting on the girls by the Sisters. That part of school feasts and village festivals, she said, where the ladies go round with plates, and do awkwardly what trained servants do well, spoils the pleasure of the guests by making them feel awkward and ill at ease, and turns hospitality into condescension. Miranda was one of the very few people who understand how to give.

The programme was printed in red and gold on silk, so that every girl might carry away and keep hers as a little memento, just as right-minded men love to keep the *menus* of good dinners, and turn to them in after years, with mingled feelings of regret for the excellent things eaten, drunk, and said, on those joyous occasions. And it ran as follows—the red and gold are here unavoidably omitted:

ABBEY OF THELEMA.

Floral Games, July 28, 1877.

To be enacted, represented, and performed for and by the maidens of Weyland Village and the country round.

The games will commence at three p.m. But those who arrive earlier will find dinner laid for them in the long marquee at one. The Band will begin to play at two, and will go on with intermissions all the day.

At 3 p.m.—There will be a canoe race on the river between Brother Peregrine and Brother Lancelot. The prize will be permission to bestow a gold locket on any one of the guests.

At 3.30—The Wizard of Assam.

At 4 p.m.—A game of Polo, in which the Monks of the Abbey will each worthily play a monkly part.

At 5 p.m.—There will be a running race for the younger girls. Prize, a new bonnet to be selected by the winner

At 5.30 p.m.—Tea in the long marquee.

At 6.30 p.m.—A Lottery in the Lottery tent.

At 7.0 p.m.—The performance of a new and original village Comedy, written especially for this entertainment by Sister Desdemona. Music and songs by Sister Cecilia. The characters will be sustained by the Brethren and Sisters of the Order.

At 8 p.m.—A concert of old English music.

At 8.30 p.m.—Dancing and Lighting of the Lamps.

At 9.30 p.m.—Supper in the Long Marquee.

At 10 p.m.—A Grand Surprise, by Brother Peregrine.

At 10.30—Fireworks.

The guests are invited to enter freely all the tents, especially that of the Gipsy, and that of the Magic Mirror.

God save the Queen.

This programme looked very pretty indeed, edged round with flowers, and beautifully printed, as I have said, in red and gold. It was presented to every visitor, on arriving at the lodge gate.

There were about a hundred and fifty girls in all. They came from all sorts of places for miles round; they came on foot; they came in spring carts; they came in omnibusses; they came in vans. They came hours before the time. They came dressed in their very best, and in the happiest mood. But though they knew something of the preparations which had been made, they were not prepared for the splendour and beauty of the scene which awaited them; for the Venetian masts, the streaming banners, the bright tents, the music—which began sooner than was advertised, because there were so many who came as early as noon—and the crowd which went to and fro, and gave life to everything.

There were no men except the servants, for the monks did not appear till the time came for their performances. Ladies there were in plenty come to see the fête, the real

purpose of which was known only to Desdemona and Miranda, but no gentlemen were admitted with them.

I do not think the rural nymphs lamented the absence of their swains. Some few might, perhaps, have allowed a transitory feeling of regret that so much care on their appearance would have no result in attracting some other girl's young man; some might have felt that with a bashful lover at one's elbow things would have seemed more complete. But with most there was a feeling that the shepherd swains would certainly have got drunk, as they did at Mr. Dunlop's festival, and so spoiled everything. Fancy a lot of drunken louts among these beautiful tents and flags.

Village beauty is a flower of not unusual occurrence, as many of my readers have observed. In Gloucestershire there is a prevalent oval type which sometimes gives a face of singular sweetness: in Somersetshire the type is squared off, somehow, and when you get a pretty face there it carries an expression of something like sullenness: the Hampshire folk, with their brown hair and round faces, are sometimes comely: and the North-

umbrians with their long faces, blue eyes, and gentle voices, are often charming. At Weyland Park, which, as everybody knows, is in no one of these counties, the average of village beauty was not, perhaps, very high, but there was plenty of health in the rosy faces, and of vigour in the sturdy arms : considered as the mothers of England's future sons they afforded reason for rejoicing ; but the general type of face was decidedly common. Yet there were exceptions.

No one among them all who could have guessed the real reason of this lavish preparation for a simple girls' merry-making. To Miranda, no expenditure could be too lavish, so that it was for Alan. With a sorrowful heart she provided this magnificent entertainment as a sort of welcome to his wife ; supposing that his wife was among the hundred and fifty country nymphs who graced her feast.

The Brothers and Sisters dropped in one by one, and fell into the places assigned to them in the programme. The canoe race was paddled on the narrow little river, as tortuous as the Jordan, by Tom Caledon and Brother Peregrine, and it was won by Tom because his

adversary, in his extreme eagerness to win, lost his balance and upset, to the rapturous joy of the assemblage. But some thought that he upset himself on purpose, in order to present the pleasing and interesting spectacle of a figure dripping wet, embellished with duck-weed, and running over the lawns to change flannels. In former days this amusement used always to be provided on Procession-day at Cambridge; the boats taking it, I believe, in turns to sacrifice themselves on the altar of public derision.

Sister Desdemona presented Tom Caledon with his prize, a gold locket and the permission to give it to whatever girl he pleased. There was a general flutter among the maidens as he stood like a sultan, the locket in his hand. They stood grouped together in little knots, as if jealous of each other; and all eyes were open, all lips parted in eager expectation of his choice.

There was one girl among them who looked at Tom with a kind of confidence—she alone among them all. She was a fair-haired, blue-eyed girl; tall, pretty, and of graceful figure.

"Alma thinks she's going to get it," they murmured. "There's lots prettier than her." Tom, however, did not give it to her. He stepped straight to where, quite in the background, little Prudence Driver, Alan's librarian, stood little thinking of the honour that was about to fall upon her. She was not pretty, nor was she graceful, but Tom knew how Miranda regarded her, and he thought to please the Abbess. An angry flush rose to the cheek of the girl they called 'Alma, but there was no possibility of disputing the award.

The Polo fell rather flat, although the Brothers played well and with address. Polo does not powerfully appeal to the village maiden's imagination.

Then there came the lottery—all prizes and no blanks. The prizes were articles of costume, useful and ornamental. Nelly held the bag, and each girl on drawing her number rushed straight to the lottery-tent, to see what was her prize.

Then came the wizard with his Indian conjuring tricks, which made them breathless with wonder and terror. And all this time

the music played under the trees ; and there was the gipsy's tent, in which your fortune was told for nothing, and you came out knowing exactly not only what kind of husband you were to have, but also, what Mrs. Harris yearned to extort from Mrs. Gamp, your "number."

And then—ah ! then—there was the tent of the Magic Mirror. Within among many curtains, and in a dim twilight, sat an aged, white-bearded man in black robes and wonderful hat, who asked your name and your age, and who then invited you to behold yourself in a mirror. That was not much to do, but as you looked, your own face disappeared and behind it came a picture—a scene in your future life. And then this remarkable old man told you things. These must have been different because some of the girls came out with heaving bosoms, glistening eyes, flushed cheeks, and pallid lips, gasping in anticipation of the promised joy. But some emerged with downcast looks, pale and trembling, their day's enjoyment gone. The prophet was no other than Brother Peregrine himself ; it was no business of any one's that

he had with him in the tent a certain "wise woman" who whispered him little secrets about every girl as she came in. She was invisible behind a curtain. I regret to say that the fame of this wonderful sorcerer spreading upwards, so to speak, many of the ladies and some of the Sisters sought the tent of the Magic Mirror. Among these was Nelly who came out looking sad and disappointed, and when she met Tom sighed and said, "I am so sorry that I went into the tent of the Magic Mirror. Poor Tom!"

Now Tom knew who was the sorcerer, and he gathered that his rival had taken a mean advantage by means of his magic spells. Therefore he inwardly cursed all necromancers.

Where was Alan? Miranda was disappointed at his absence. He had faithfully promised to come—and now evening was approaching and the beauty of the fête was over, but there was no Alan.

The play, which was a light burletta, with village girls and pretty songs, was well received, and the concert was endured. And then they began to dance, for the sun was

down now, and the summer twilight was fallen upon the trees and the park, and they were lighting the coloured oil lamps. It was a new Vauxhall, only none of those present could remember the splendours of that place. And what with the coloured lights and the band and the glamour of the whole, a sort of intoxication seized the girls, and they became, in a way, possessed of the Bacchante madness, in so much that they laughed and sang, and seized each other by the waist and whirled round madly till they fell. And among them all ran in and out that tall thin man, with the lines in his face, whom they called Brother Peregrine, who whispered to one and danced with another and conjured for a little group, all at the same time, and with unflagging activity.

As for the rest of the monks, they were dancing with such as knew how to dance, except Mr. Caledon, whom all the girls knew; and he walked up and down among the lights with Miss Despard, whom they knew as well. And her face was melancholy. And Miranda moved here and there always graceful, always queenly with her little court, consisting of

Desdemona, Cecilia, and Mr. Rondelet, happy in her experiment but for one thing, that Alan, for whom this entertainment was designed, was not present.

At ten the supper was served. There was a sort of high table at which sat Miranda, with her court. She was looking up and down the long rows of girl-faces before her with a critical but disappointed eye.

"They giggle dreadfully," she whispered to Desdemona, who was sitting beside her.

"People who live far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife generally do giggle," Desdemona replied.

"And I am not at all sure about their temper. Look at that black-haired girl; should you think she was good-tempered?"

"Certainly not," said Desdemona. "I know the sort—short of patience, hasty in wrath, and unreflecting in the matter of punishment. She would box Alan's ears every day till he brought her to Weyland Court."

"I have looked up and down the rows at the table; but I can see no one who in the least degree approaches Alan's simple ideal. I despair!"

"So much the better, my dear, because the fancy may pass away. We have always got our right of veto. Just suppose, however, that these girls knew what we know. Fancy the airs, the bridlings, the jealousies with which these Cinderellas would receive the gracious Prince when he came. I suppose, by the way, that he will come some time this evening?"

"He said he would. One would think," said Miranda, with a little bitterness, "that he would feel some little interest in the assembly."

But supper seemed to be over. What was the surprise promised by Brother Peregrine?

He answered the question himself; that is to say, his Indian servant brought him a small box. With this in his hand, he begged Miranda's permission to make a little speech.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I am going to minister to their vanity," he replied. "In my experience of the uneducated—only the uneducated portion—of your sex, I have found that to minister to their vanity is to afford them the most lively gratification. I am going to make one girl su-

premely happy, two or three madly envious, and the rest proud of their sex and of themselves."

He took Miranda's permission for granted and advanced to the front, facing the long tables at which the girls had taken supper.

"Girls," he said, holding solemnly before him the mysterious box, "I promised you a surprise with which to close the day. It is here, in this box. In the days when the old gods pretended to govern the world, and made such a mess of it that we have been ever since occupied in setting things to rights which they blundered over, there was once a banquet—not so good a banquet as this at which we have just assisted, but still a creditable feed. And while the gods were sitting over their wine and the goddesses looking at each other's dresses"—the girls began to wonder what on earth all this unintelligible patter meant—"some one who shall be nameless threw among the assemblage a golden apple—a golden apple," he repeated, "on which was inscribed, 'For the Fairest.' The adjudgment of this apple produced great disasters to the human race, which mattered

nothing to her who received it, because she scored a distinct triumph over her rivals. This preamble brings me to the box. Trumpeters, if you please."

The two trumpeters of the Abbey, who had meanwhile stationed themselves at either side of the speaker, but on a lower step, blew a great and sonorous blast.

"This golden apple," the orator went on, "supposed to have been quite lost for many thousands of years, has been miraculously preserved to the present day. It is in my possession; it is in this box. I am about to restore it to its original use. Trumpeters, if you please."

While they blew again, the attention of the girls being now thoroughly aroused and their interest excited to the highest point, Brother Peregrine opened the box, and took out, suspended by a silver chain, an apple, wrought, or seeming to be wrought, in solid gold.

He handed this to his Indian servant, who, bearing it reverently on a cushion, passed down the lanes of the girls, allowing them to hold it in their hands, to weigh it, and to gaze at it. The dark Indian, with his turban and

white tunic, the silver chain and the golden apple, and the mystery of the whole thing, filled all hearts with a trembling eagerness.

"That apple, continued Brother Peregrine, "is offered to the fairest of you all. The ladies of the Abbey of Thelema do not propose to enter into competition. It is for their guests alone that this gift is offered. Point me out the fairest."

There was first a dead silence, and then a confused hubbub of tongues, but no one was proposed.

"This will not do," said Tom Caledon. "Let them separate into committees and vote."

It was difficult, but was effected at last by the process of dividing them into groups of ten and making them select the two prettiest girls from among themselves. This reduced the number of candidates from a hundred and fifty to thirty. The thirty were then ranged in a row, while their less fortunate sisters sat behind, silent, and devoured by irrepressible envy.

"The number must be still further reduced," said Brother Peregrine. "I must have three

presented to me, among whom I shall choose the fairest."

Again Tom Caledon managed the business. He gave them voting-papers and collected their votes.

There were thirty voters.

When the papers were unfolded it was found that there were thirty nominations.

It thus became apparent that every girl had voted for herself.

This was discouraging, but Tom began again, offering each girl two votes.

The result of this method was that there was a distinct and large majority in favour of three girls, whom Tom Caledon placed before the giver of the apple, in a row, and then retired.

It was an impressive scene. On the platform stood Brother Peregrine—tall, thin, with a smile in his eyes, though his lips were firm. Below him his Indian servant, bearing the apple and the chain on a cushion. At either hand the gorgeous trumpeters. Behind, the ladies and the Brethren of the Abbey. The three girls standing trembling with ill-disguised impatience, edging away involun-

tarily from each other like guilty persons. And behind, the crowd of girls pressing, swaying, laughing and whispering.

"They are all three pretty," whispered Miranda to Nelly; "and all three in different styles."

The first was a tall girl, with perfectly black hair and plenty of it, done in a careless kind of knot which allowed—though that was perhaps the effect of dancing—one or two braids to fall upon her neck. She carried her head in queenly fashion, and looked straight before her into the face of the man who represented the shepherd of Mount Ida, with a pair of full lustrous black eyes, which were what some ladies might call bold. Her features were regular: her mouth was rather large, and her figure full. Her limbs were large, and of generous contour. She was Black Bess—her Chrissom name was Pamela, but everybody always called her Black Bess—the daughter of the blacksmith. She was the girl of whom Desdemona had said that, if Alan's choice fell upon her, she would box his ears every day until he took her to reign at Weyland Court. And she looked it. As for forward-

ing his schemes in the village, or laying herself out for the Higher Culture, whatever intentions in this direction she might start with, the end of those intentions was apparent.

She wore white muslin with cherry-coloured ribbons, which would have been in excellent taste, and suited her shape and complexion, but for an unlucky yellow sash which revealed the imperfectly-educated taste, and made Miranda shudder. In her hand she carried her hat by the ribbons, and her face expressed the eagerness of tumultuous hope.

Next to her, the second of the chosen three, was a girl not quite so tall as Black Bess, but with a figure as commanding and a look as queenly. She had brown hair and hazel eyes, but the eyes were as cold as those of Black Bess were full and lustrous. Her hair was piled and rolled upon her head so that it resembled a helmet. Her features were more prominent than those of her rival, and had a certain hardness in them. Also her chin was a little too long and square, and her forehead a little too high. She wore a dress of some soft lavender colour, without any ribbons, but

a rosebud at her neck, and another in her hair. And she, too, carried her hat by its ribbons.

"See," whispered Miranda. "She has taste. But what a cold expression!"

She was a nymph from a neighbouring village; Black Bess and the third were Weyland girls.

The third, indeed, was no other than the bailiff's daughter, Alma Bostock. She was less in stature than the other two, but as graceful in figure, and far more lissom. She was a buxom, healthy-looking damsel, about eighteen years of age, with light-blue eyes, and light-brown hair which fell behind her and over her shoulders in an abundant cascade: she had a rosy cheek and a white forehead: she had red and pouting lips, with a little dimple in either corner: her nose was just a little—perhaps—tip-tilted. She had thrown aside her hat, and was standing with clasped hands and trembling figure, her eyes fixed eagerly on the golden apple, mad to win the prize of Beauty. She, like Black Bess, was dressed in white, but she had blue ribbons, and there was nothing whatever to mar he simple taste of her costume. Indeed her

mother, the ex-lady's-maid, superintended it personally, and made her discard every scrap of colour, out of all the ribbons which Alma wished to wear, except the simple blue. So that of all the girls at the fête, there was only one, the tall, brown-haired damsel beside her, who was so well and tastefully attired.

And then Brother Peregrine, taking the prize from his servant—at which act the eyes of the Chosen Three lit up suddenly, and became wistful—dangled it thoughtfully before them for a few moments, and then began, slowly and with hesitation, to speak.

"I am not Paris," he said. The elected wondered what he meant, while the Monks and Sisters of Thelema pressed more closely behind him, wondering what would happen; Miranda vexed that Alan was not there, and yet half afraid that if he came he might take some sort of fancy to one of the Three. "I am not Paris, the shepherd of Mount Ida. Nor is this, indeed, the mountain. And what I hold in my hand is not, I am sure, an Apple of Discord. You, my very lovely young friends"—here he cast an eye upon Nelly, on whose face there might have been seen a

half-amused, half-contemptuous glance, as if nobody under the rank of a lady *could* be called lovely—"are not goddesses, it is true. You are not Hêrê; nor you Athênê; nor you, pretty damsel with the light brown hair, Aphroditê. Yet, at this important juncture, I feel as if you were, respectively, those three divinities."

He stepped down from his position of vantage.

"Let me try the chain upon the neck of each," he said. "Advance, maid of the ebon locks and lustrous eyes."

Black Bess understood the look, though the language was too fine for her, and stepped forward promptly.

"Let us see," said Brother Peregrine, "how the chain looks round your neck." He threw it over her neck, and, as he did so, whispered quickly: "What will you give me for it."

"I will teach you," whispered the half-gipsy girl, hotly and eagerly, "how to wire hares and pheasants, how to cheat at cards, so that no one shall know how—oh! I've taught lots of men—and how to tell fortunes, and steal away girls' hearts."

He laughed, took the chain from her neck, and called the next one.

"What will you give me," he asked, "if I let you have the apple?"

Perhaps she had heard the former question, and had time to make up an answer.

"I will tell you," she whispered, "what girls talk about—ladies too—and what they want, and then you will never be afraid of your wife, and rule your own house."

It was an odd thing for a village girl to say; but perhaps she had read books.

"It is the truest wisdom," Brother Peregrine murmured in reply. "And if knowing your wife was the first step to ruling her, one might be tempted. But I have known husbands who knew their wives quite thoroughly, and yet were ruled by them."

He took the chain from her neck, and called the third girl.

"What will you give me for it?" he whispered, as he put it on.

"Give me the apple and the chain," she whispered, with quivering lips. "Give them to me, and I will give you as many kisses as you like."

Brother Peregrine, with a virtuous frown, took off the chain, and returned to his platform. The excitement was at its highest.

"It is mine," he said, "to award the prize. I have seen the three candidates, I have spoken to them; I have, before you all, tried them. Girls, I wish there were three golden apples. But there is only one. And a precedent has been laid down for us. Like the Idæan shepherd, I adjudge the prize—to Aphroditê."

He stepped down, and laid the chain once more round the neck of Alma Bostock.

The other two girls, without a word, turned away, and, with heavily-laden eyes, pressed through the crowd, and so into the outer night. Under the trees, beyond the light of the coloured lamps, they spoke to each other.

"What did she promise to give him?" asked Black Bess, with heaving bosom and parted lips.

"I don't know—I don't care. A CAT," replied the other.

Then they separated by the space of two yards and a half, and, sitting down upon the grass, broke into sobbings and cries.

But within the marquee it was the hour of

Alma's triumph. There was a murmur of approbation as Brother Peregrine suspended the chain round her neck. Indeed, she *was* the prettiest, and, at that moment, as she stood there, her eyes brightened, her cheek flushed, the silver chain round her neck, the golden apple at her heaving breast, every eye upon her, the hands of all applauding, her whole frame swaying beneath the excitement and victory of the moment, Alan Dunlop entered the marquee. Miranda, Nelly, and Desdemona, with the other Sisters, were stepping from the platform to congratulate the victor; the band was striking up a triumphant march; the girls were all laughing and talking together. Alan concluded, rashly, that the whole thing had been got up by Miranda for his own benefit. In this sweet-faced village girl, the queen of the festival, he saw the maiden whom Miranda had chosen for himself, and he caught her hand with effusion.

"Miranda," he whispered, with the deepest feeling, "you have found for me the girl I have been in search of. I thank you—for a wife."

CHAPTER III.

"The rank is but the guinea stamp,
The man's the gowd for a' that."

"ALL is lost, my dear," cried Desdemona when the fête was over, and the pair were sitting alone at midnight in Desdemona's cell. "All seems lost, that is; because while there is no wedding-ring there is hope. But to think that we have fooled away our right of veto!"

Miranda could only sigh.

"The sight of that girl, looking really beautiful, *for* a girl in her position," continued the elder lady, making the usual reservation, "finished the man."

"And he thinks," said Miranda bitterly, "that I got up the whole scene for the sake of advising him! I even to dream of his marrying Alma Bostock!"

"It has been all my doing," Desdemona

said in sorrowful accents. "All mine. I told him he ought to marry; I devised the fête. I arranged the Surprise with Brother Peregrine. I only am to blame. And yet, it is fate."

Then Miranda began to take comfort out of what comfort remained.

"After all," she said, "if he is going to marry a country girl, he might easily do worse. Alma Bostock will never rise to his level, but she may be sympathetic; and perhaps she will respect him. Oh! Desdemona, it is a poor consolation, this 'may-be.' And I feel that I cannot any longer sympathise with Alan."

"No; that would be difficult indeed. A man may make mistakes of all kinds; he may even go and live in a village and pretend to be a farm-labourer; but the mistake of such a marriage he may not make, for Society will never forgive that kind of mistake. A bad marriage——"

Here she stopped, and was silent, thinking, perhaps, of her own married life.

"There ought," she went on, "to be special juries, composed entirely of married men—

and they should be gentlemen, not greengrocers—to consider cases of mistakes in marriage; and divorce should be granted as the only relief. Poor dear Alan! Poor mad Hamlet. Go to bed, my dear Ophelia, and sleep with happy dreams, while I think how I can alter the last act of the play, and turn it into 'All's Well that Ends Well.'"

And when the next day Lord Alwyne came on a visit to the Abbey, Desdemona received him in fear, not daring to tell of the impending trouble. He began to talk at once about his son.

"I have seen Alan sitting in a labourer's cottage, with a stone floor and a deal table. I have also seen him masquerading in a smock-frock, with a cart. And after that, Desdemona, I felt that there was no further room for astonishment whatever the misguided boy might do. It is not a pleasant thing, however, for an old-fashioned father to see his son's name flourishing in the papers. The other day they had a special column and a half devoted to an account of a visit to Weyland, and an interview with the shepherd Squire, as they were pleased to call Alan."

Desdemona could say nothing in solace, because what was coming was a great deal worse than what had gone before. And they talked of other things.

In fact, Alan came over without delay to communicate his intentions to his father. It was filial of him; and I suppose there were still some remains of ancient prejudice as regards rank and caste about him, because he approached the subject with some hesitation.

"I fear," he said to his father, "that you have no sympathy with my present mode of life."

"Why, no, Alan, I certainly have not."

Desdemona was present; in fact, the interview took place in her "cell," where she and Lord Alwyne had been holding an animated conversation over certain memories of old days—the days when she was young, when there were little suppers after the performance, and little dinners at Richmond on Sunday evenings. Alan's sudden appearance, with his grave face and solemn eyes, rudely disturbed this harmonious duet of reminiscence.

"No, Alan," his father repeated, "I have never attempted the necessary effort at pumping up sympathy for you; it would require too great an exertion; but I pity you, my dear boy. I find I can manage so much without fatigue."

Alan smiled. He could afford to be pitied; but he could not afford to fail and be ridiculed.

"Perhaps you will pity me more when I tell you what I am going to do next."

"I don't think I could," said Lord Alwyne lazily. "All my available pity, now that my old friends and I have to pity each other for the loss of youth, is yours already. There is only a certain amount of pity in every man's constitution. Men differ in this respect, however, as they differ in weight. You may try, if you like, Alan."

"I have been long thinking upon the best way to bridge over the gulf which divides me from the mind of the labouring classes."

"I thought you had answered it by jumping into the gulf, just as young Parisians, who think that everything is finished, jump into the Seine. But if that did not do——"

"It did not quite. In fact, I have had to

confess lately that my experiment has in some respects been a failure."

"Aha! Now I am really glad to learn that. I am interested this time. Then, Alan, I hope that you will give up masquerading as the homely swain, and come back to our arms as the country gentleman again. Desdemona and Miranda will forgive you, and all shall be forgotten. We will never allude to the dreadful past again."

Alan shook his head. "Not yet, sir, I think. Most likely not at all; because I am now going to commit myself to an act which is also experimental, and yet, if it fails, can never be undone."

"That sounds very serious. Do you know what he means, Desdemona?"

"I am afraid I know too well."

"In fact," continued Alan, not facing his father's eyes, but uneasily playing with the ornaments on the mantel-shelf, "I have come to the conclusion that the only way for one class to understand another is for them to intermarry."

"I see," said Lord Alywne slowly, while a look of pain and disappointment crossed

his face, "I see—and you propose—yourself—to intermarry with the class which is the lowest. Is that so?"

"That is what I mean."

"Do you wish to introduce this as a general practice, or to illustrate in your own case how the theory works?"

"I live in the way I think best for carrying out my own ideas," said Alan, with a little pride. "Others may follow me or not, as they may think best. I am only sorry that my proceedings must shock your feelings."

"Nothing shocks me," said Lord Alwyne untruthfully; "I am too old to be shocked by anything. And, besides, your idea is not a new one. Royal houses have often bridged over the gulf by marriage—morganatic. By means of the female branches, indeed, all ranks of society must have been by this time thoroughly understood by the higher class. But pray go on."

"I am perfectly serious," said his son. "To intermarry with a family of the soil will be to create new sympathies, and establish ties which may lead to all sorts of valuable results.

We will suppose that I am married to—to a girl of this village, poor, of course, but creditably brought up by respectable parents, endowed with as much mother-wit as any of her superiors, able to give me her experience in dealing with the class from which she sprang . . ."

"The situation is novel," said Lord Alwyne; "but I doubt if my imagination can follow it in all its consequences . . ."

"Well, but will it not afford me opportunities such as I could gain in no other way, of influencing the villagers? They will look on me as one of themselves: I shall be their cousin, their brother . . . You think this wild enthusiasm, I suppose?" he said in an altered voice.

"No, my son, not at all; I think nothing. You have the advantage of me by thirty years. That is a great pull to begin with. I shall not try to understand where the modern ideas come from, nor whither they tend. It might make me uncomfortable. It might even make me want to follow you, and, like Don Quixote, go a shepherding in my old age. That would be detestable. But I confess

I am interested. Let us see: you marry this girl. You are therefore the cousin of half the village at once. That will, as the first obvious consequence, enable them to borrow money of you. You will live here, at your own place?"

"No; I shall live in the village. Only I shall get a more comfortable place than I am in at present."

"That will be in some respects better. As to your wife's relations, now: they would be free of the house?"

"Surely; that is part of my purpose. It would be an education for them to see how a household may be simply conducted on principles of the best taste."

"In case of a dinner-party, now, or an evening—"

"We should give no dinner-parties."

"I was only thinking," said Lord Alwyne softly, "of an elementary difficulty—that of evening dress. Excellent as your new relations would be in all the relations of life, I suppose that a dress-coat is not considered necessary in their circle?"

"Surely," said Alan, "in such a matter as

this we need not stop to discuss evening dress."

"Indeed, no. As the poet says:

> "'The rank is but the guinea stamp,
> The man's the gowd for a' that.'

The matter only occurred to me in thinking of what your own prejudices might be. Mere prejudices. In smock-frock or evening dress, what is a man *but* a man?"

Alan moved uneasily.

"Evening dress—evening dress," he repeated. "What have we any more to do with evening dress?"

"Your wife will be able to receive," pursued his father, "at five o'clock tea. Desdemona, you will describe to me by letter, I am sure, how the Sisters of Thelema got on with the gentle— I mean the *employés* in smock-frocks. It will be almost like a scene from the opera . . . . By the way, Alan, at such receptions the smocks are clean, I suppose?"

"My dear father, I am serious."

"So am I, my son—so am I. Never more so, I assure you."

Lord Alwyne's words were genial enough, but his manner was cold. Alan knew with-

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out these symptoms what his father's reception of his grand project would be.

"And when you return to the Hall, with your wife, whom you will have trained by that time in your cottage to the outward semblance, and perhaps the bearing, of a lady—what will you do then about the relations? By that time, though, they, too, will have adopted the manners of polite society, and will be able, I suppose, to hold their own at a dinner or a ball. We shall have the smock-frock in society at last."

Alan made a gesture of impatience. He was thinking of the present, and here was his father making suppositions about the future.

"I shall never go back to the Hall," he said, with decision. "My life is devoted to the village."

"Yes: that is noble. But what about the children? I suppose we may contemplate that possibility? You cannot leave Weyland Court to any one but your eldest son. He will, I suppose, be trained to occupy his position as a gentleman?"

Alan refused to contemplate the possibility of children at all. Children would com-

plicate his proposed arrangements altogether.

Then Lord Alwyne summed up.

He lay back, resting his eyes on the comely proportions of Desdemona, and speaking languidly as if, which was the case, the business was beginning to bore him too much to talk about it.

"Of course, Alan, you know, without my telling you, what must be my feelings as regards this project. In the benighted days of my youth I was taught that by birth, by education, and perhaps by the inheritance of those qualities which pushed my fathers to the front and kept them there, I was, one of the natural leaders of the people. I chose my line, as my elder brother chose his; and while he very properly accepted the position of politician, a sacrifice which must require a great deal of resolution, I, for my part, preferred to become a leader in society. Up to the present I have seen no reason to regret my choice. The country never had better statesmen or better soldiers than when they all came from one class. And I think it never will again have better, because our

men have nothing to gain, either in money or rank. The other classes may produce poets, novelists, artists, lawyers—all sorts of worthy and delightful people—but has not yet produced great administrators or great generals. And, in my opinion, that comes of descent. For work which requires a cool head and unflinching courage in the storms of unpopularity or ill success you want a man who inherits those qualities. That is my simple creed, Alan. The Fontaines have been to the front for six hundred years or thereabouts. The Dunlops, your mother's people, have been country gentlemen, knights, and soldiers for as long. And all the time we have kept on intermarrying. We have kept to our own class. You will marry out of it. For my own part, I do not wish to bridge over the gulf between myself and my servants; I would rather let that gulf remain. The country allows those to rise who are strong enough to rise. Let the weak stay where they are."

"Social economy—" began Alan.

"My dear boy, let us not begin with social economy. It will teach us nothing. We

will discuss this affair no longer. Henceforward, Alan, I shall be very glad to see you, personally, in London, but I can come to Weyland Court no more after you are married."

"I am sorry; I am deeply sorry to pain you, sir," said Alan; "but when higher duty than that of deference to your wishes falls upon me——"

"Very well, Alan," his father interrupted him. "We understand each other, which is quite enough. Go your own way, and forget the old notions, if you please. But I cannot go along with you. Shake hands, my boy; we have not quarrelled, and do not intend to."

Alan went away, his face rendered sadder. Out in the park his eyes suddenly lit up, and he raised his head. Was he thinking of that bright and blooming girl who stood before them all in the marquee, the light of the lamps upon her face, her lips parted, her bosom heaving, her eyes dancing with pride and joy while Brother Peregrine gave her the golden apple? It is quite possible. Man is but man. Even Aristotle, as everybody who

has read the "Lay of Aristotle" knows, succumbed to a pretty face. And as Alan proposed to marry her, he was *dans son droit* in letting his thoughts run upon his future wife. But perhaps, after all, he was thinking how Miranda would approve of this additional self-sacrifice.

When he was gone, Lord Alwyne turned to Desdemona, raising his hands before his face, palms outward. It is the gesture of sorrow, disappointment, or disgust.

"Poor Alan!" he said—"poor boy! All his fine theories have come down to this: to live in a cottage, work as a common labourer, and marry a labouring man's daughter. I always told my wife that bringing him up at home would be his ruin. Marry a labourer's daughter!—bridge over the gulf!—oh! Desdemona, for the first time in my life I regret that we are not in France, before the Revolution, and that I cannot get a *lettre de cachet*."

"He is not married yet," said the actress.

"Not yet; but he will be married before long."

"I say he is not married yet."

"Do you mean, Desdemona, to hold out hopes?"

"I do," she said. "I will tell you nothing more: but I have hopes, and I shall set to work."

Lord Alwyne reflected.

"I will not ask now," he said. "I would rather not know. I cannot plot against my son. But, Desdemona, in memory of our long friendship, help me if you can."

She did not answer for a while, sitting in thought. Presently her clear eyes became heavy with tears.

"Ours has been a long friendship, Lord Alwyne," she said, "and it is my greatest pleasure to think about it. It is thirty years since first you stood by the young actress and protected her reputation against cruel attacks that were made upon me, and are always made on women of my profession. I am grateful for that. And it is five and twenty years since when, in my day of trouble, there was no one in the world but you who had the courage to take me away from it, and to do it openly, so that no one could throw a stone. As dear as my honour is to me,

Lord Alwyne, so deep is my gratitude to you."

Meantime in Alan's brain was ringing the name of the girl he had seen last night, her face lit up and surrounded as by a nebula of joy and pride.

"Alma Bostock."

And while the name went clanging in his brain, he began to think of his future father-in-law. The outlook in that direction was not promising.

"He is crafty," said Common Sense.

"He is not a man of broad views, but hard-working," said Enthusiasm.

"You suspect his honesty," said Common Sense.

"That is because I am growing suspicious," replied Enthusiasm.

"He thinks bad beer and you think fine claret," said Common Sense.

"Then we will teach him a liking for claret," said Enthusiasm.

And so on, carrying on the conversation for a mile and a half, until all that could be said against the worthy Bailiff had been said, and the result remained that if ever there was

a fitting subject for the operation of example, precept, and exhortation in the direction of the Higher Culture, Bailiff Bostock was that special subject. And he could be got at readily by means of his daughter, Alma Bostock! Now that the idea of marriage was assuming a concrete form instead of a vague and shadowy umbra, like a ghost to look at and quite as terrifying, it did not seem so dreadful a business. When Panurge was suffering from those cruel doubts of his concerning marriage, he had no one, so far as we have been informed, in his eye. Now Alma Bostock appeared to Alan the very girl made to his hand. There must be, he had always said, some approach to delicacy in his wife. This he could hardly expect to find in the coarse and red-handed daughter of a ploughman. His wife must belong to the class among whom he was about to live. Alma's father was but a step removed, while her mother was herself the daughter of a cottager. Here he made a great mistake. Bailiff Bostock considered himself much more than a step above the labourer. Just as the Queen must find it difficult to understand, even with

the help of Miss Yonge's novels, the little distinctions of middle life—how the chemist is a greater man than the grocer: how the smallest professional man keeps apart from trade: how the curate cannot break bread with a retailer—so Alan Dunlop did not understand that his Bailiff stood upon a platform a great deal higher than his labourers, and that Alma, whatever she might do, would certainly not be likely to sympathise with the rustics.

Alma Bostock was the one girl in the village who would do for him—of that he was quite certain. All the rest were coarse, commonplace, repulsive.

He spent an agitated evening, wandering into the library and out of it, talking in a purposeless way with Prudence, his librarian. There was no one else there, of course.

"Prudence, you must be lonely, sitting here every evening, and no one coming here but yourself."

"No, sir, not very lonely; I've got the books."

"We must find some one to come here a good deal, and brighten-up things for you."

He was thinking in some vague way how Alma would set the example of spending an evening or two every week among the books, and how that example would spread. The next morning, instead of going off to the farm work, he put on the ordinary habiliments of an English gentleman, and went over to the farm-house.

It was nine o'clock when he started. Miranda, he thought with a pang, reflecting how his marriage would separate him from her, was at that moment taking breakfast—probably at the Abbey. The members of the Order would be dropping in one by one in their lazy fashion. There would be devising of plans for the day, talking over all the things which rejoice cultivated men and women; and all in the pleasant softness of ease, and art, and luxury. And he was going to cut himself off at one stroke from this Castle of Indolence. Was it yet too late? Yes: the experiment must be tried: his long-matured scheme for the regeneration of mankind must be carried out to the very end. Farewell, Thelema: farewell, Desdemona: farewell, Miranda. For here he was at the garden-

gate, and there, in the garden, was the very girl whom he came to woo.

I think that even Miranda, Nelly, and Desdemona, jealous as they are of conceding beauty to women of the lower class, would have acknowledged that Alma Bostock, standing in the garden, made a pretty picture in the morning sunlight. It was a long, narrow garden, sloping down the hill on which the house stood. On either side was an orchard, and stray apple-trees were standing in the garden itself. These were old, and covered with yellow lichen, which contrasted with the dark branches, and the light green leaves. Behind the garden was the farm-house, a picturesque and gabled red brick house, with ivy climbing over one end of it, and throwing arms round the angles so as to embrace the whole house. Facing the garden, a window on either side, was a broad and massive porch of wood-work, round which the creepers clung and clambered. The garden was planted with gooseberry-bushes, currant-bushes, raspberry-canes, and strawberry beds. There was a narrow walk in it from the porch to the garden-gate, bordered

with box, and behind the box an edging of flowers—such as gilly-flower, double-stocks, sweetwilliam, candytuft, Venus's looking-glass, London pride, and mignonette—the kind of flowers which require least gardening; and there were a few standard roses close to the house itself. Under the apple-trees, with the soft light of the sunshine broken up into a thousand fragments by the dancing leaves before it fell upon her, stood Alma herself. She was out there to gather red currants, and she had a basket on her arm for the purpose; but she was not gathering currants at all, only standing with head bare, and thrown back, gazing into the distance, lost in meditation.

Alan thought of certain lines of poetry, and his heart softened towards the damsel. She looked dainty all over. Her head was shapely and her profile clear; her dress fitted her pretty figure perfectly; in fact, her mother, formerly lady's-maid to Alan's mother, made it for her. And it was of a soft grey colour, which suited the light greenery of the apple leaves. One of her arms was bare; and it was not a red and blowsy arm—not at all—it was as white as any arm could be, and as

well shaped. And on either side of the garden lay the orchard, with little glades of sunlight and of shade. While Alan looked, the girl tied a handkerchief over her head, which set her face in a white frame, and made her look ten times as pretty. So pretty a girl, Alan thought, could not be other than bright and sympathetic, and quick to feel and to respond. Besides, was she not the selection and choice of Miranda?

As for Alma, indeed, opinions among her acquaintance were divided. For her enemies, who were the young women of the place, declared that she was deceitful and treacherous. They also said that she was by no means so pretty as she thought herself. The young men of the place, on the other hand—curious what diversity of opinion may exist in the smallest village—declared that there was nobody so pretty as Alma Bostock. The only objection they had to her was that she held her head so high and made believe to be a lady.

Meantime, she stood beneath the trees, a very pretty picture. Did a painter want to draw the ideal country girl, engaged in the

ideal country occupation, he would find no more charming picture than that of Alma in the garden, with her basket ready to hold the ripe red-currants.

A very pretty picture, and a suggestive picture. Alan's thoughts flew with a rush to the Arcadian life he had imagined, which would, with the help of Alma, begin as soon as the wedding-bells should ring.

He lifted the latch, opened the garden-door, and stepped in to begin his wooing.

CHAPTER IV.

"Her disposition she inherits, which makes fair gifts fairer."

Alma Bostock saw Mr. Dunlop open the gate and walk up the path without any other emotion than a little surprise that he should be without his contemptible smock-frock. She held him in small respect, considering his self-denying life as a proof of mere feebleness of brain; but he was undoubtedly a man to whom outward respect was due, as the fountain and source of the family well-being. There was perhaps another reason why she regarded Alan with some contempt. It is well known in her class, and among her sex, that gentlemen, of whatever rank, are not insensible to the attractions of pretty girls, even when of lowly birth. Alma had good

reasons for knowing this fact. Only a week before, Mr. Caledon, meeting her in a shady lane, while she was balancing a basket on her head, bet her a sovereign that he couldn't kiss her lips without the basket falling off. He lost the bet. And Mr. Roger Exton, the gentleman who gave her the golden apple—made her Beauty-Laureate—the funny man with the lines about his face, walked home with her through the park, when Miss Miranda and the ladies had gone away, and insisted on payment of the promised reward. But from Mr. Dunlop, who was so much about the place, no attention of that or any other kind. No use being the prettiest girl in the village, if you get no compliments by it. Might as well be the ugliest. Mr. Dunlop had eyes for nobody, they said, but Miss Miranda. And yet in no hurry to put up the banns.

If it had been Tom Caledon marching up the path, Alma would have smiled and nodded gaily, sure of a talk and a laugh. As it was only Mr. Dunlop, she made a salutation of ceremony, which was by no means too graceful.

Alan's thoughts were quite simple.

"She is good-looking," he might have said. "A little awkward, which teaching will cure. I wish she would not drop a curtsey. She looks appreciative, as well as pretty. She must be sympathetic and ready, otherwise Miranda would never have selected her. Of course, I am not the least in love with her. How could one be, after Miranda?"

"Good-morning, Alma," he said, taking off his hat, as to a young lady. Alma thought this cold and ceremonious, but quite characteristic of the Squire. "I came over to see you by yourself. Are you alone?"

"To see me, sir?" she asked, with wonder. "Yes, I am alone. Mother's gone a-marketing, and father's about the place somewhere."

"Alone. Then we can talk, you and I?"

"Yes, sir." Alma, at sight of those solemn eyes gazing intently and earnestly in her face, felt her ancient respect for Mr. Dunlop increase rapidly, until it almost amounted to terror. "Yes, sir. There is no one here. Will you come in out of the hot sun? Father 'll be in for dinner, and I'll give him your message."

"My message is altogether for yourself, Alma. You may tell your father afterwards if you like."

What on earth was he going to say? Could that rash fellow, Harry, who promised to tell nobody anything, have gone talking to the Squire? It *must* be Harry; and what a rage father would be in! Certainly, Harry's position in society was not that which could be expected of one who would mate with a Bostock.

With these misgivings, Alma led the way into the best room, the apartment reserved wholly for visitors of distinction. It was a room of small dimensions; what, however, it lacked in space it made up in stiffness, like some small dame of dignified and upright bearing, decked in antique bravery. The table had a dozen keepsakes, and such light reading, ranged round it. There were slippery, horse-hair chairs, on which no one could sit, unless he held on by the back of the next chair; and a horsehair sofa, on which if any one had ever tried to recline, needs must that he repent it afterwards. And the artificial flowers on the mantle-shelf, and the vases

of thirty years ago, and the cheap German prints, and the coldness of the room, whose windows were never opened, struck Alan's heart with a chill. And yet what a room might this be made when the principles of the Higher Culture should have taken root! On the right of the window, the pretty wooden porch, covered with its creepers; on the left, a little lawn, with standard roses; and beyond, the greenery of the orchard. A room whose windows should open to the ground, which should be hung with light draperies, and painted in green and grey, and furnished in black, with just a little china. The girl herself, Alan thought, would set off the picture, were she but dressed to correspond with the furniture.

"What is it, Mr. Dunlop?"

He recovered himself and looked at her again with a curious gaze, half of inquiry, half of hesitation, which frightened her. He could not, really, have seen Tom Caledon—no; that was impossible. And no business of his if he had. It *must* be Harry.

"Won't father do as well, Mr. Dunlop?"

"No," he replied, "he will not do nearly

as well." He sat down, but the treacherous nature of the horsehair chair caused him to abandon this attempt in confusion. Then they both remained standing, rather awkwardly, Alan beside the table and Alma by the window.

"You know," he went on, "what I am endeavouring to effect in this village—and I hope my work has your sympathy and that you understand its great aim—to increase the love for Culture and the practices of the Higher Life. Your father lends me his cordial aid"—here Alma turned away her face to hide a smile. "You have seen me at work for a good many months. And you have seen, I dare say, that my efforts, so far, have been a failure."

"Well, sir," said Alma, "I always did say that for the Squire to put on a smock-frock like a common labourer and go a hay-making, and reaping, and hedging with a passel o' village boys was a thing I couldn't hold with. And mother said the same; said my lady would ha' blush red to see the day. Father, he only said, 'Let him alone.' That's all father ever said. But he's that deep, is father."

"Yes," Alan went on, "we have not succeeded very well, he thinks. Your mother and you were right so far as you understood. And your father, in his rough way, was also right in saying 'Let him alone.' It is what I expected of him. However, I have found out at last the main cause of my failure, and it is this, Alma—alone and single-handed I cannot do much in the direction of culture. I can only set an example which may or may not be followed. If I am married, now; if I am married to a girl who understood the classes among whom I labour—don't you see, Alma?—I should be working double, not single. Do you begin to understand?"

Not at first. She looked wonderingly in his face. Then, all of a sudden, she did understand, and first she turned red and then ashy pale. Could it be? Was she in her senses? And the Squire, too? And never so much as a chuck under the chin from him to give her warning of what he intended.

"I will repeat," he said, "I want to find a girl who understands, as I never can really understand, the classes among whom I work.

I want her to marry me in order that I may work with double my present efficiency. I want her to join with me in learning what is best, teaching what is best, practising what is best, and showing by our own example, plain for all to see, the life that belongs to the higher civilisation."

It could not be. But yet—but yet—things looked like it. If the Squire did not mean that, what could the Squire mean?

"Will you," he added, "will you marry me, Alma?"

There was no possible mistake about that invitation. Five words most unmistakable. As Alma looked at Alan with frightened, wonder-stricken eyes, so looked Semelê when Zeus proclaimed his love and told her who he was. So also, but with the sheepishness natural to his sex, young Anchises gazed upon the white-limbed Thetis when she astonished him by stealing up along the golden sands, dripping wet, resplendent in her beauty and radiant with her newborn love. So looked the beggar-maid when she left her barrel-organ and received from King Cophetua, not a royal penny with a royal pat

upon her fair cheek, but instead a golden wedding-ring, or the offer of one, when the monarch, in robe and crown, stepped from his throne to meet and greet her on her way. The age of that monarch is nowhere mentioned, but it must have been very advanced, and his rash act was doubtless speedily followed by deposition and consignment to the County Asylum.

Alma did not answer—she could not answer—perhaps thinking of Harry. But she looked him straight in the face and tried to understand this wonderful proposal.

In two minutes you can get through a good deal of thinking.

What in the world would Harry say?

Sweet passages—many passages sweet and tender—had gone on between Harry and herself. Would he take it crying, or would he take it swearing?

Then the thought of Weyland Court. Oh—h!

She would be mistress of that beautiful place, where her mother, always full of its glories, had been lady's-maid. She would be the lady—with a carriage to drive in and

horses to ride—the equal of Miss Dalmeny, the superior of Miss Despard. And what would Harry say when she drove by resplendent in silk and satin?

Help in his work? What did Mr. Dunlop mean by that?

"Well, Alma, what do you say?"

"I don't know what to say," she replied; "I'm struck of a heap."

Alan shuddered. "Struck of a heap!" But then the training had not begun. "Miss Dalmeny did not prepare you for this proposal? I thought that she had spoken to you about it."

"Miss Dalmeny!" She opened her blue eyes wider. "Why, what in the world should Miss Dalmeny want you to marry me for? And everybody says that you and she are as good as handfasted, a'ready."

Really, this young woman would require a good deal of training.

"Never mind Miss Dalmeny, then, but consider what I propose. Will you marry me?"

"It *can't* be real," said Alma. Scared out of her wits. How different from Tom Caledon,

and, indeed, all the gentlemen with whom she was acquainted. A laugh and a compliment: a kind word or, perhaps, if no one was within sight, a kiss—which, in young ladies of Alma's position of life, is neither here nor there, a mere unconsidered trifle. But to stand there cold and quiet playing with his watch-chain and waiting for an answer!

"It *can't* be real," she repeated, turning the corners of her apron in her fingers. This may be objected to as a trick of the stage, but all tricks of the stage come originally from life outside the house, and some old fashions linger; therefore, Alma being, as she subsequently described it, in a quandary, the like of which she had never before experienced, turned the corners of her apron in her fingers.

"I thought you had received some intimation," Alan went on, feeling a little pity for the embarrassment of the girl. "I do not come to you, as you see, professing passionate love. That is not at all my motive in offering you marriage. You may, however, depend on receiving all possible kindness and consideration. And I do not invite you to a life of luxury and ease. By no means. You

will go on living just as you do now, only with more attention to externals."

She did not understand one single syllable that he said. "Marry her, and go on living as she was accustomed to live?"

"What I want in a wife especially is advice, sympathy, help. She will supplement my own deficiencies of knowledge. I want her to be always at my hand suggesting the one right way and preventing all the wrong ways. I want her, in fact, to be the Lieutenant in my work. Can you do this, Alma? Can you be this to me?"

She gazed at him in mere stupid bewilderment. Give him—Mr. Dunlop—advice? Give him—the Squire—sympathy?" She thought sympathy meant pitying people who are unlucky enough to have fevers, rheumatisms, or prison fare. What did he want sympathy for? And then to give him help?

Perhaps he was cracked. People in the village did whisper that the young Squire *must* have a soft place in his head. To be sure, if he had come like a lover should—

> ". . . . the young man, he comes dancing,
> With a 'How do you do, my dear?'"—

if he had told her that because she was such a very pretty girl, and because her eyes were so blue, her lips so rosy, her cheek so soft, and because she had won the golden apple, which was a clear proof of her superiority, and because she must, being so beautiful, necessarily be good in proportion, therefore he had fallen madly in love with her: then, indeed, she would have believed entirely in his sanity. But to march gravely into the house, to look at her as if he was a schoolmaster and she a pupil who had done wrong things, with those solemn eyes of his, and then to say that he wanted to marry her in order to get assistance in his work—why, the man must be gone clean stark-staring mad.

Marry her and go on living as she had been living? Churning butter, perhaps. Oh! yes, and she Mistress of Weyland Court. Likely! And milking cows—and she with her best frock on every day. Or darning stockings—and she with silk ones. Picking red currants—and she with a dozen servants. And perhaps making the beds. Very likely. Work, she imagined, meant

this kind of work and nothing else. He must be mad.

"Come, Alma," said Alan, who had been listening patiently, "what do you say?"

"I don't know," she replied with hesitation, "about helping in your work. But I've always been used to house-work, and I suppose I should be able to learn what you wanted me to learn. Only I don't understand. But you don't really mean it, Mr. Dunlop? It's only some of your fine gentleman's fun."

The idea of Alan Dunlop ever having manifested any fine gentleman's fun in his life!

"You can't mean it," she went on. "Up at the Court, with all those beautiful Sisters to pick and choose from." Alma's notions of Alan's irresistible charms might have pleased a vainer man, but he received the words with a shudder. Fancy "picking and choosing" among such girls as Sisters Miranda, Rosalind, Cecilia, and the rest. "There's Miss Despard as beautiful as beautiful. Or there's Miss Miranda herself, like a Queen. And yet you

come to me and tell me you want to marry me."

Was then the *Droit du Seigneur* ever in force in this country? It never once occurred to Alma that she could refuse so wonderful and surprising a proposal.

To be sure the position was remarkable.

"You do not quite understand as yet, Alma," said Alan gravely. "With these young ladies there has been no question of marriage. And I propose this—this union—in the hope and belief that by forming new ties—I am afraid, however, that I cannot make you entirely comprehend my views all at once. Trust yourself to me, Alma, and I think you will never have reason to regret your consent."

He held out his hand and she took it. The manners of the upper classes are singularly cold. How different from Harry! Why, only last night, when he took leave after a stealthy and hurried interview at the garden-gate, had he not with his arm round her waist, given her kisses twain—fair and honest kisses—one on either cheek? Did gentlefolk never kiss each other? If

Miss Miranda had said yes, would he not have kissed her? A pang of jealousy crossed the girl's heart. She was not good enough, then, to be kissed?"

"We will meet again to-morrow, Alma," said her suitor. "There is a great deal to be talked over. For the present, good-bye."

He was gone, and she, though, with the slender power of imagination at her command, she found it difficult to believe, was actually betrothed to Mr. Dunlop, the owner of Weyland Court.

Alma sat down on the least slippery of the chairs and tried to realise what it all meant. She would certainly have a carriage—she would certainly have servants—she would certainly not do a stroke of work herself. She would be a grand lady—she would go about with Miss Dal——; no, she hardly thought she should care to see very much of Miss Dalmeny. And what did Mr. Dunlop mean by asking her whether Miss Dalmeny had prepared her for the proposal? Then she knew all about it, and not one word of kindness from her the night before, when Mr. Exton gave her the golden apple. She was good enough

to marry Mr. Dunlop; but not good enough to be spoken to by Miss Dalmeny. Very well, then, some day—and here she began to dream of impossible revenge, a safety-valve for small natures. She could not understand it. What would her father say? What would her mother say? What would Harry say? What would all the world say?

Then, for a brief space, imaginary Rapture, Joy, Triumph, while the wedding-bells rang and outside the church the coach-and-four waited, the gallant steeds tossing impatient necks, and the tag-rag—including the bold-faced gipsy thing, the blacksmith's daughter, who dared contest the golden apple with her—stood and watched and envied.

Then, for a longer space, a sinking and sadness of heart. What would Harry say? She had attracted, during her brief span of nineteen years, as many suitors as, in that short period, a maiden may. Young gentlemen who knew her had not disdained to pay her those attentions which please them and hurt nobody. There had been farmers' sons—in fact there were still farmers' sons, be-

cause no one was ever dismissed. But for a permanency, there was Harry.

He was a gamekeeper. One of Mr. Dunlop's gamekeepers. Would he still continue, Alma wondered, to game-keep for the Squire when she was married to him? He was a tall, stalwart, handsome young fellow of two and twenty, and he loved the girl with a passion which she could neither understand nor return. What maiden of Alma Bostock's nature can return the passion of a man who loves her? As well ask the shallow rippling lake to reflect in all its strength and glory the splendour of the sun. He believed in her love as an honest man should. His blood would have boiled had he known of these passages to which we have been constrained, sorrowfully, to allude, with Tom Caledon, Mr. Exton, and others. Of them he knew nothing. To him the girl was a pearl among maidens, full of sweet and lofty thoughts, too high for him, who was one of nature's own gentlemen, and as incapable of a meanness as any peer of noble lineage. He made her his idol, his goddess. He saved and economised for her, paring down tobacco to the

lowest point compatible with a pipe a day, cutting off beer, and living at the lowest, so that he might save money to buy furniture and make his Alma comfortable. He would have liked nothing better than to wrap her in swan's-down and leave her no work to do but to sit warm and comfortable while he worked for her. And all this Alma knew.

That was the gamekeeper's idea of love and marriage : the wife was to be cosseted up and cared for by others. She was to sit warm and comfortable while her husband did what the Americans call the "chores." Her place was to look happy while she was petted and made much of. Well, that is a kind of duty, Alma thought, which most girls find to come pretty easy.

On the other hand, the Squire's idea about wedlock seemed to be that his wife was to do great quantities of work—perhaps the washing and the mangling. No doubt he must be cracked. Still, he had the good sense, Alma thought, to come to the prettiest girl in all the country-side. Also, though she was young and artless, the thought did occur to her that when once they were married, marriage

being a tie impossible to dissolve, the wife might fairly sit down and refuse to do anything, after which the Squire would have to keep her, as the Squire's wife ought to be kept, in idleness.

But what in the world would Harry say? He was a masterful man, and he was strong. Suppose he and the Squire were to fight about her. Such things had been. Alma's heart glowed within her, as she pictured such a battle as she had read about—all for her—she herself looking on from a safe distance. And yet Mr. Mill tries to persuade us that woman's influence has always made in the direction of peace.

Suddenly she became aware that it was half-past twelve o'clock. Simultaneously with the striking of the clock arrived her mother.

She was hot: shewas a little out of temper: she was disappointed with her marketing.

"Alma!" she cried. "You here?"

In point of fact, Alma ought to have been in the kitchen, where the potatoes were still waiting to be washed and peeled and all sorts of culinary operations were already overdue. And to find her daughter actually sitting down

in the best room in the morning was revolutionary, simply.

"Yes, mother," she replied meekly; "I am here."

"And where are the currants?"

"I haven't picked them."

There was something peculiar about the tone of Alma's voice. Generally, she was extremely obedient, having been rendered so, like Shagpat, of immortal memory, by reason of thwacks. But to-day, without being exactly mutinous, she was calmly superior.

"I have not picked them," she said. A bare statement of the fact.

"Oh! and what in the world have you been doing, then?"

"Nothing."

Of all replies that Alma could have made, this was the most astounding. Had she been pert, which often happened; had she been saucy, which was not unusual; had she been rude, which happened both when she was pert and when she was saucy, an answer would have been found; but that she should calmly and without excuse, state that she had done nothing, was beyond all Mrs. Bostock's ex-

perience of girls, and she had had a long and painful experience.

She gasped.

"And the potatoes?"

"I haven't touched them. I haven't been into the kitchen at all."

"And the cabbage?"

"I don't know nothing about the cabbage."

"And the beef?"

"I haven't touched the beef. I tell you I haven't been into the kitchen this morning since breakfast."

"Alma Bostock," said her mother calmly, but with despair, "are you mad?"

"No, mother."

"Has father been carrying on? Have you up and sauced your father, child?"

"No. I haven't seen father; and I don't want."

"Then what's the matter with the girl? Is she gone out of her senses with last night's tom-foolery?"

"No, mother. It isn't that."

Just then returned her father. He, too, was out of temper, because things had not gone altogether right in the matter of buying

and selling, that morning. It was nothing connected with Alan's interests. Quite the contrary. Only a *coup manqué* of his own, a little transaction in which plain honesty for once would have done better than chicanery.

"Now what's this?" he asked abruptly, seeing the elements of a domestic row.

"I don't know what ever in the world has come over Alma," said her mother. "Been sitting down, if you please—sitting down—here—here—all the morning and done nothing! You'd better come back in an hour's time, father. There can't be no dinner till then. No potatoes peeled, no cabbage washed, and the beef not in the pot; and my young lady sitting on the sofa, as grand as you please, doing nothing."

Bailiff Bostock banged his riding-whip on the table so that the window-frames rattled and every individual keepsake on the table jumped into the air with alarm.

"Now, you—go up to your own room," he said. "Hanged if you were a couple of years younger if I wouldn't lay this whip over your shoulders. Get out of my sight, I say, lest I do it now."

Alma meekly obeyed. But as she mounted the stairs there was a twinkle in her eye and a dimple at the ends of her lips which showed the anticipation of a little game of table-turning, of quite a supernatural kind, in the immediate future. Her mother saw both twinkle and dimple, and returned to her kitchen, deeply marvelling what manner of thing had happened unto her daughter.

CHAPTER V.

"Then a most astonishing thing happened."
VICTOR HUGO.

THE bailiff banged about the room like a bluebottle against a pane of glass, swearing at large. His wife, used to these illustrations of temper, went on peeling the potatoes.

"I can't think," she said quietly, "whatever can have come to Alma. Who ever heard tell of such a thing before?"

"I know what is going to come to her," replied Alma's father grimly, "if it ever happens again."

Then there was a pause, after which, observing that if dinner was not ready in half-an-hour he would perpetrate mysterious horrors, the bailiff retreated.

Alma remained upstairs.

Presently her mother called her. There

was no answer. Then she ran up and tried the door, which was locked and bolted.

"Come down this minute, Alma."

"Shan't," the young lady replied.

"Come down before your father comes home. He won't take any more notice."

"Shan't," Alma replied again.

"Come, child. Don't make your father mad."

"Father," she said, "may get as mad as he likes. I mean to stay here till he comes upstairs and begs my pardon."

"Then, my lady," said Mrs. Bostock, "you'll have to stay pretty long." There was no reply, and Mrs. Bostock returned to her potatoes.

The bailiff walked down his garden in angry mood. From the garden-gate, looking down the road, you could see the beginning of the village. He leaned over the rail and looked up and down.

Things were not going so well as, with his opportunities, he had a right to expect. Two hundred and fifty pounds a year, *and* the buying and the selling, meant other possibilities. There was, for instance, a little commission on which he had fully cal-

culated. The other party, to the ineffable disgrace of humanity, had that very morning disclaimed the transaction, and refused to part with the ten per cent. This disgusted the bailiff, and predisposed him for wrath. Alma's strange forgetfulness was, therefore, like a spark to a mine. After exploding he left the house, and leaning over his garden-gate, brooded as a deeply-injured man for a few minutes, and then, half mechanically, opened the gate and strolled along the road in the direction of the village.

It was a bright and beautiful day in July, the sun lying hot and strong upon the fields, turning the green corn into yellow, and doing all sorts of fancy painting with apples, pears, and peaches. The bailiff, who wanted a great deal more culture before he could get the right grip of nature's beauties, walked, growling to himself, with the intention, I believe, of taking a glass of beer, as a snack before dinner, at the Spotted Lion. But as he passed the Squire's cottage, he was hailed by the tenant.

"Come in, Bostock," cried Alan. "You are the very man I wanted to see."

The bailiff growled again, and swore melodiously between his teeth; but he obeyed the invitation.

Alan was writing, but he put aside his pen, and turned his chair from the table.

"Now, then," he said. "I was coming up to see you this afternoon, to say what I have to say." He rested his head on his hand, and his elbow on the arm of his chair, looking at the bailiff in his meditative way. Bostock thought he looked at him reproachfully, and began to wonder if anything had come out. It is always disagreeable to be afraid of something coming out. In the case of gentlemen like Mr. Bostock, too, there are so many things which one is anxious to keep in obscurity.

"Well, sir?" he said, feeling hot and uncomfortable.

"Pray take a chair, Bostock. We will leave the door open for coolness. First of all, about the farm."

"What about the farm?"

"Well: we are not doing well with it. You can see that by your own accounts. Can you recommend anything?"

The bailiff thought that accounts are things

over which a Christian compiler may rejoice, inasmuch as they may tell a different tale to him who writes them and to him who reads. But he did not say so.

"I am disappointed, I confess, with the result. I hoped that there would be a margin of profit; but we are sinking deeper and deeper."

"Well, sir, you see there's all the charges you made on it at first: the machinery, and the rise of wage, and all. And then it is but a small farm. If you really want to make money—what a gentleman like you would call money—by farming, farm large. Get two or three of your farms, run 'em into one, and make me—there, now, that's the only way—make ME bailiff of the whole."

Alan allowed this suggestion to fall to the ground.

"You may strike one of your labourers off the roll, Bostock. I have decided that I have done all I can by my year's work upon the farm. If I have failed to make myself a friend of the men, which is, I am sorry to say, the case, I have learned what a rough and hard life they have, and how difficult it is to

move in the direction of culture men whose days are spent in labour. That is something. Where I am most disappointed is that I cannot get any nearer to them."

"You're quite near enough," said the bailiff.

"The men shun me: they will not work with me if they can help it. Even with the boys I make no headway. They look upon me with some sort of dislike."

"That lot," said Mr. Bostock, by way of consolation, "would dislike the Devil himself."

"Well, the end of it is that I withdraw from the field-work. There is plenty to do here: I have to arrange my amusements for the winter, get the Art Gallery in order, make another attempt at night-schools—plenty to do. But I am going to take a very serious step."

Mr. Bostock turned pale. Not going to dismiss the bailiff?

"In order to enter fully into the mind of the people, to sympathise with them, to understand my own failure up to the present point, and guard against more and greater failure, I must have a wife. She must be herself a daughter of the class, or near to the

class, among whom my life is to be spent; and she must be ready to enter into my views, and help me in my work."

Mr. Bostock stared with all his eyes. What the deuce did all this mean?

"In so important a matter—because I cannot pretend to be actuated by the—the usual motives in seeking a wife—I took the advice of friends. They have pointed out to me the girl who seems to possess most of the requirements for the position. That girl is——"

"Not Black Bess, daughter of the blacksmith!" cried the bailiff, in alarm; for the blacksmith and he were not friends.

"No—not that young woman," Alan replied, with a smile. "In fact, Bostock, it is—your daughter."

"My gal? Mine?" This time he jumped out of his chair with excitement. For in a moment that crafty brain saw the boundless possibilities of the position. For himself, ease and comfort assured for life: no more necessity for paltry cheateries: the luxury of virtue attainable without an effort: and even if awkward things did come out, the certainty that they would be smoothed over.

"Yours, Bostock."

"My gal!" he repeated, slowly. "Mine!"

He opened his lips and gasped. This was indeed a Providential go.

"You are not joking, Mr. Dunlop?"

"You ought to know by this time, Bostock, that I am not in the habit of joking." This was quite true. No one ever knew Alan Dunlop make a joke. He would as soon have stood upon his head.

"I have already spoken to Alma about it—in fact, I spoke to her this morning. She has consented to become my wife on the terms I propose, to join in my work among the village people, and raise them, with herself, to the higher levels."

"Oh!" Bostock became more and more bewildered. The young lady whom he threatened with his horsewhip half-an-hour before was already, then, the betrothed of Squire Dunlop. "Oh! You have spoken to my gal," he added, slowly, "and my gal has consented. Ha!"

"I hope you have no objection, Bostock."

"Well, sir," he replied with dignity, "I don't see any objection if Alma's willing.

That gal was born to raise herself—we see it in her from the beginning. And she has a feeling 'art. Like her father, she has a feeling 'art."

"Very well, Bostock. I will go over and see her again to-morrow morning."

"What will Lord Alwyne say, sir?"

"My father never interferes with my scheme of life," said Alan. He nodded his head and returned to his writing, as if that interview was over.

Mr. Bostock hastened home with a very different air from that with which he had set out. And when he entered the kitchen, which was at the very moment when his wife was dishing the potatoes and setting-out the dinner, he came in whistling and singing, like unto a jocund swain of Arcady.

"Why, Stephen, what's come over you now?" His wife thought that he might have had some slight touch of sunstroke, or some sort of fever. But no; it was not sunstroke, nor fever. Joy, as we know, does not kill. "You whistling and singing! and Alma—— why, all the world's gone mad!"

"Where is my little gal?" he asked, with

emphatic affection, rubbing his hands together. "Where is my little gal?"

"Where should she be, an idle hussy, but where you sent her—in her bedroom, sulking?"

"Ah, we are but purblind mortals, wife." He filled, and drank a glass of beer. "Only purblind mortals in the day of our wrath" —this was Scriptural—"and no man knoweth what a talk with the Squire may bring forth. My little gal is upstairs, in her bedroom, is she? Well, it's a warm day and she'll be cool and comfortable there. Go and tell her to come down and kiss her daddy. You and me will peel the potatoes; she shall sit on the sofy in the best room and look pretty."

Was the man stark staring mad?

"My gal, Alma!" he sighed sentimentally. "Mind, wife, I always did say that gal would be a credit to us. And a feeling 'art."

"If you did say that, Stephen, you said it behind my back. Feeling heart? Yes, after a bit o' ribbon and a ruff. Alma won't come down, she says, unless you go upstairs and beg her pardon."

"At any other time," said her father, rising with alacrity, "at any other time but this, I'd see Alma d——d first, and break my stick over her shoulders afterwards. Now, my dear, it's my turn to sing small; very small we must both sing now."

"Why, what has happened, Stephen?"

Stephen did not reply, but climbed heavily upstairs.

"Alma," she heard him cry in honeyed tones. "Alma, my little gal, come out and kiss your daddy."

"Say 'I beg your pardon,'" cried Alma shrilly, from the safety of her own room.

Mrs. Bostock laughed with the incredulity of Sarai.

"I beg your pardon, Alma," said her father. "I beg your pardon, my little gal; come out and kiss your loving dad."

The door was instantly opened, and there was a sound as of a paternal embrace, and a kiss upon the forehead. And then they came downstairs together, the father with his arm round his girl's waist.

"Lord!" said Mr. Bostock, "if I'd only a known it. But there, you see, you said

nothing. That was your artfulness. Kiss me again, pretty."

"Now, Bostock," said his bewildered wife, "when you've done carrying on like a Tom-fool in a show, p'r'aps you'll sit down and eat your dinner."

"Dinner!" cried the bailiff, "what's dinner at such a moment? We ought to be drinking champagne wine. And we shall, too; only you wait. Alma, tell your mother all about it. No—I will. This gal o' mine,"—he laid his broad hand upon her head, and the triumph of the moment was to Alma almost as delightful as the triumph of the golden apple.—"This gal o' mine, who takes after her father for sweetness of disposition, is going to marry no less a nobleman than Mr. Dunlop—there!"

Tableau!

But Mrs. Bostock said, when she had recovered something of her tranquillity, that it seemed to her an unnatural thing, and one which, if brought to her late lady's knowledge would make her turn in her grave. This aristocratic platform was the result of having

been a lady's-maid. Both the bailiff and his daughter despised it.

How Mr. Bostock spent the afternoon in surveying the land which he already regarded with the eye of a proprietor; how he saw himself, not bailiff of the smallest and least productive farm on the estate, but steward of half a dozen farms rolled into one; how he revelled in anticipations of large balances at the bank; how he puffed himself up with the sense of his newly-born greatness—these things belong to the chapters of Paralipomena. And if every novel had these chapters published in addition to its own, the world would not be wide enough to contain the literature of fiction. To the same chapter belong the flatness of the afternoon for Alma, and the mixture of pride and disgust which fell upon the soul of her mother.

In the evening, after sunset, the girl slipped out unobserved. Her father had just lit his pipe and her mother the lamp. One was sitting over needlework, the other over a book of accounts. It was quite usual for her to go out in the evening, and neither made any remark.

She slipped down the long garden-path as fast as her feet would carry her. At the garden-gate she looked up and down the road. Presently, a tall form came quietly along in the twilight. It was that of Harry, the gamekeeper. She opened the gate, and he came in, following her across the beds to the orchard at the side, where they could talk without fear of detection. This, in fact, was their trysting-place.

"I heard," said Harry, "about the fooling of the gold thing. Don't you turn your head with vanity, Alma. Not but you deserve it better than Black Bess, and if you like it, why—there—it don't matter to me."

He has got his arm round her waist, and is a tall young fellow, looking handsome and well-set-up in his rough gamekeeper's dress.

"No, and nothing will ever matter to you any more, Harry," said the girl.

"Why, what's happened, Alma?"

"Oh! Harry, you and me can't ever marry now."

"Why not? 'Cause of father? Who cares for your father?"

"No, not because of father—worse than that—'cause of the Squire, Mr. Dunlop."

"What's he got to do with you and me, Alma?"

"A good deal, Harry. He pays your wages, which is what he has to do with you. And he has asked me to marry him."

"You! Alma—you! To marry the Squire!"

Even the bailiff's astonishment was not greater than honest Harry Cardew's.

"You, Alma?"

"He will have it, Harry. I can't help myself. Besides, though I like you the best, and you know that very well, it *is* a grand thing to marry the Squire. And if I was to say 'no,' there's all the rest to pick and choose from. For he's determined, he says, to marry in the village, so as to get to understand—— there—I don't know."

Harry was staggered. He was prepared for almost any other kind of blow. That the bailiff would not consent he knew already; but Alma had promised, with every vow that the girl knew, fidelity to him. She would keep company with no one but him: how, then, about that walk through the woods with

Mr. Exton? The young man trusted her, as is the way with loyal young men. And now she was asked in marriage by the Squire—of all men in the world. Did Rebekah, when the great sheikh's messengers bore her away, leave behind her some mourning swain of Padan-Aram?

"What did your father say?" asked Harry.

"Father's proud. Been kissing and hug ging me all day long," Alma replied.

"What would your father say if you told him you liked me best?"

"Father 'ud beat me to a mash," said the girl with the straightforwardness of conviction.

"So he would—so he would. Bostock's handy with his stick, 'cept when a man's about. Well, you ain't married yet, my beauty. You go on easy and quiet. Don't you fret. When the right time comes, we'll see."

"Why, what would you do, Harry?"

"Never you mind, pretty. I've got your promise and the broken sixpence. Go on fooling round with the Squire a bit longer, if you like—let your father make what he can out of him while the sun lasts, for it won't last long. And when it comes to a wedding, it'll

be Harry Cardew and Alma Bostock, not the Squire at all. So there, now."

There was an air of strength and certainty about her lover which was not unpleasing. And the way in which, putting his arms round her, and kissing her at odd intervals, he assumed that she belonged to him, was at once terrifying and delightful. It would never do to miss the chance of Weyland Court, for although Mr. Dunlop said something foolish about work in the village, that was all nonsense, and she intended to live as the wife of the Squire ought to live, in idlesse at the Court. On the other hand there would be the dreadful trouble of a husband of whom he was afraid. Far better the man who held her in his arms, the handsome, stalwart Harry, as brave as a lion and as strong.

"So there, Alma, my gal," he said, "and now, good-night. I've got to think over it somehow. If I must speak to Mr. Dunlop, I shall tell him everything. But I shall see. Keep up your courage, my dear."

He left her and she returned to the house.

Her father was drinking brandy-and-water.

"Where have you been, Alma?" asked her mother.

"Into the garden for my basket," she replied, using a figure of speech common among young women, but not inculcated in any of the copybooks, called the *suppressio veri*. She had, in fact, brought back a basket.

"Your mother," said Mr. Bostock, "says it isn't natural. I suppose flesh and blood isn't natural next, nor a pretty girl isn't natural. To me, now, it only shows what a straight man Mr. Dunlop is. What a man! As I said the very first day when he made me his bailiff. 'He is a man,' I said, 'as knows a man when he sees a man.' First, he says to himself, 'I want a bailiff. Where shall I find that bailiff? Where am I to go for honesty and hard work? Stephen Bostock,' he says, 'is that man.' Next, he says, 'I want a wife—not a fal-lal fine lady, but a honest wife. Where shall I find that wife? Alma, daughter of Stephen Bostock, is the girl for me,' he says; 'my bailiff's gal. She takes after her father and has a feeling 'art.'"

He looked round the room triumphantly, after quoting this double illustration of his employer's remarkable acuteness.

"Going into the garden after your basket," he echoed, after a pause. "Next year you'll be sending your footman into the garden after your basket. See how different men are from women," he observed. "Mr. Dunlop wants a wife. He takes his bailiff's daughter. Now if I had a boy, do you think Miss Miranda would marry *him?*"

"I am quite sure," said his wife, "that she wouldn't be such a fool."

"No, she wouldn't. Gar! it's their cussed pride."

They left him alone presently, and he drank more brandy-and-water, considering how this new relationship could be turned to the best advantage. He saw many ways. As he considered each in its turn his face assumed the varying expressions of conceit, selfishness, cunning, and extraordinary satisfaction.

He sat up in his chair and slapped his leg, a resonant slap, which woke up Alma lying in the room above, and made Harry the

gamekeeper, a mile off, think there was a shot in the preserves.

"It's fine!" he ejaculated. "Dammit—it's fine."

CHAPTER VI.

"They say, best men are moulded out of faults!"

So Alan Dunlop became engaged.

Events of great magnitude are seldom long before they meet with the trumpet of Fame. It need not be detailed how the intelligence was received at the Spotted Lion: how the thing, whispered at first from ear to ear, was speedily proclaimed upon the housetops: how, finally, the London papers got hold of it, and sent specials down to write sensation columns on the Weyland Experiment.

The members of the Order, for their part, received the news with unfeigned disgust. There could be no longer any doubt as to Hamlet's madness. A man may give up all that makes life desirable and go to work in a smock-frock, and yet not be mad. A man may fancy that he will be able to educate the

British peasantry into a love for culture, and yet not be mad. Dubious and ill-defined as is the borderland between sanity and its opposite—multitudinous as are the men who cannot quite see things as other men see them—there can be no doubt as to which side he belongs who, being a gentleman, actually proposes to marry a village girl, without the pretence of passion, and solely in order to carry out an experiment. The opinions of the fraternity, variously expressed, amounted, therefore, to this, that Alan Dunlop must be mad. The spirit of the Order, which requires affection and service to be given by knight to demoiselle, and not to fillette or chambrière, was infringed. It was *lèse-majesté*—high treason against Love. And to the Sisters, though none expressed the feeling in words, it seemed a cruel slight towards their Abbess.

Naturally, it was Miranda who first talked about it. The Sisters, or a good many of them, were collected in Desdemona's cell, which was, as we know, a great place of morning resort; chiefly because its occupant sat there over what she was pleased to call her work, which was chiefly the devising amuse-

ments for the Abbey, and because she never minded interruption.

"I have known," said Miranda in her quiet and straightforward manner, seeming to be aware of the thought that lay in every mind—"I have known for some time what has been in Alan Dunlop's mind; and it is a great unhappiness to me, because, of course, he has always been a great deal to me, a part of my life."

Desdemona, from the depths of her easy-chair, murmured lightly:

"Henceforth, let us acknowledge that Hamlet is really mad. To have been with Miranda all these years, and not to have fallen in love with her, is alone enough to prove it. Has he made love to any of you, my dears?"

No: there had been no sign of flirtation, no indication of the slightest tendency in that direction towards any of them. Their pretty heads shook with unanimous sadness—call it rather pity—that one so handsome and so admirable from every other point of view should be so cold.

"Confirmatory evidence," said Desdemona.

"He has been insensible to the single beauty of Miranda when he was alone with her, and to the collective beauty of the Order. Oh! he is quite, quite mad. And yet we love our Hamlet."

"No," said Miranda, "Alan is not at all mad: he is only an enthusiast: he has chosen a path full of difficulties, and he does not always see his way plainly. I fear he has made a grave mistake."

Said Desdemona: "But he is not married yet." She said it with emphasis.

"Unfortunately," Miranda went on, "it was partly my fault. Alan asked me to recommend him the best—or the least objectionable—of the village girls. Of course I could not conscientiously recommend him any one really, but I undertook the task in the hope that he would see the dreadful mistake he was going to make. And then, the other day, when Mr. Exton had his unfortunate 'Judgment of Paris,' just after he had awarded the prize to Alma Bostock, and at the very moment when she was standing before us all, looking her very best in the first flush of her triumph, Alan came in, and jumped at once

to the conclusion that there was the girl I had selected for his wife."

"And now," said Cecilia, with a sigh, "I suppose we shall have to disperse ourselves. There is an end of the Abbey of Thelema. Where else can the Order find so glorious a home, and so splendid an organ?"

"Where else," sighed another, "shall we find so complete a theatre?"

"Where else," asked Nelly, "shall we find such a free and happy life?"

"And a park like Weyland Park."

"And gardens like those of Weyland Court."

"And such an owner of all, such an Amphitryon," said Desdemona, "as Alan Dunlop. Hamlet with all his fancies is the best of all the Brothers. But, my children, go on enjoying youth and pleasure. The Abbey is not dissolved yet: the Seigneur of Weyland is not yet married."

"Desdemona," said Nelly, "you said that before: you mean something: you are raising false hopes. You prophesy what you wish. Wicked woman! Alan must keep his word of honour."

"I am a prophet," replied the actress, "by

reason of my age and sex. You will all become prophets in time, especially if you learn the art of foretelling by your own sufferings, which Heaven forbid. I read the future—some futures—like a printed book. Alan will not be married to the Bostock girl. Are you all satisfied ?"

"Not quite," said Nelly, the most superstitious of womankind. "Tell us more about him. Will he ever marry at all ? Will he give up his crotchets ? Will he settle down and be happy like the rest of the world ?"

Desdemona shook her head. "Do you not know," she said, "that the Oracle would never give more than one reply at a time."

"Then, tell me something about myself," said the girl.

"Look out of the window," replied the Pythoness, "and see your fate."

Nelly looked, and returned blushing.

"What have you seen, my child ?"

"Tom Caledon lying on the grass; and he saw me, and waved his hand. And Mr. Exton was walking away into the Park."

"That is your fate, my dear."

All the other Sisters laughed, and Nelly asked no more questions.

Alan did not appear that night, nor for several nights, at dinner. When he did, his manner was constrained. No one congratulated him: no one asked him any questions. Only Desdemona sought to speak with him secretly.

"I think," she said, when she found an opportunity, "I think, for my part, that a man's happiness is the very first consideration in life."

This was a proposition which could not be allowed to pass unchallenged by a man who had deliberately thrown away his own chance of happiness.

"I know what you think, Alan," she went on. "That I am a selfish old woman. Perhaps I am. I see no good, for instance, in your self-sacrifice. You were born to set an example."

"And I do set an example, I think," he replied grimly.

"Yes: the awful example. It was foolish enough to fancy that these clods would begin to long for culture because you went to live

among them. You see they do not. But it is far worse to imagine that they will be any the better for your marrying among them."

"It is my hope," said Alan, a little stiffly, "that they will. It seems to me the only chance of understanding them."

"If I wanted to understand farm-labourers," said Desdemona, "which I do not, I should get at their minds by comparison. You drink a glass of wine critically: they gulp beer greedily. You make dining one of the Fine Arts: they eat where and how they can. You think of other people besides yourself, of great questions and lofty things: they think of themselves and the soil. As you rise in the scale you shake off more and more of the animal. As you descend, you put on more and more."

But Alan shook his head.

"Then there is another thing," Desdemona went on with her pleading. "If you marry this girl with the view of using her insight and experience to help out your own, what does she marry you for?"

Really, Alan could not say why she was going to marry him. Now he came to face

the question he perceived suddenly that it might be on account of his great possessions.

"Is it for love, Alan?"

"No, I suppose not—at least I have not pretended to any love on my own part."

"Is it in the hope of furthering your projects?"

"It is on the understanding that my ideas are to be studied and furthered if possible."

"The lower you go," Desdemona went on, "the less do people care about efforts which are based on ideas. They can understand a pair of blankets or piece of beef. Charity to them means immediate help. What sympathy you expect to find in such a girl I cannot think."

He made no answer.

She went on relentlessly.

"Another thing, again. Alma Bostock does not belong to the rank of labourers."

"I see very little distance between a small tenant-farmer, who is now my bailiff, and one of his labourers."

"You do not," she replied, "but Alma does. She sees a great deal. Alan, before the eyes of all English girls of the lower ranks

there floats for ever a vision of rapturous splendour. They dream that a prince, a beautiful youth with vast possessions, is coming to marry them, and that they will go away with him to bliss unspeakable. Too often, the prince does actually come, and makes love to them. And they do go away with him—but not to marriage or to bliss, poor things. Alma's eyes are dazzled. No use for you to protest that in marrying her you want her to be your Lieutenant, that you intend to live down in the village among the people. They are not her people; she has risen a little above them: she will rise to your level, if she can. She will have her eyes fixed upon Weyland Court. As you have made her your wife, you must make her a lady. And then you will bring to your old home, not the worthy successor of your mother, no queenly chatelaine like Miranda, no sweet and beautiful girl like Nelly, but a companion who is no companion, a woman miserable because she has got her ambition, and is not satisfied because she is out of her place——"

"Stop, Desdemona," said Alan. "I have

pledged my word. All these things may be as you say. It will be my business to fight against them."

He left her, and presently struck gloomily across the Park, homewards. Ever since the day when he offered himself to the village maiden, he had been tormented by a doubt worse than that of Panurge. Said Panurge, "Shall I marry? Shall I marry not?" Said Alan, "I must marry. Have I been a fool, or have I not? And if I have, then what an amazing fool!"

For of these late days a vision of quite another kind had crossed his mind. It began with that touch of Alma's hand when it lay in his. She was to be his wife: her hand was there in token of her promised word. It was a soft hand, and small, although it did all sorts of household work; but Alan did not think of its softness. It was, somehow, the wrong hand. It was a hand which had no business with him or his. When he talked with her the same feeling came over him. He was talking to the wrong woman. His words fell into her mind like water poured into the vessels of the daughters of Danaus,

because it passed away and made no impression. The wrong woman. And if so, who was the right woman? If so, how could there be any other woman to fill that place but Miranda?

When it was too late, when he had given his promise to another, he found what Miranda had always been to him—the only woman in the world.

"A man's own happiness the chief thing to look after," Desdemona had said. And his duty to set an example in the conduct of life. Was it, then, altogether a mistake? Was his self-imposed mission, his apostleship of culture, wholly a great mistake? Was he, instead of a martyr, only an ass?

I think it would be difficult for a preacher, an apostle, or a prophet to propose to one's self a more disquieting question. Suppose Brigham Young in his old age had been troubled with doubts: suppose the Pope were to have misgivings about Protestantism: suppose Mr. Spurgeon were to become convinced that the right thing was the Establishment: suppose Mr. Ruskin doubting whether he had not better tear up everything he has written since

the "Stones of Venice": suppose Mohammed at the close of his career wondering whether he had not done infinite mischief: suppose the Archbishop of Canterbury becoming a Ritualist: suppose Mr. Gladstone beginning to stone the priests. Such a revolution was going on in poor Alan's brain. Was he a confessor for the faith, was he a young man who had generously sacrificed himself in the pursuit of a noble cause, or was he—alas!—was he only an ass?

The owls in the trees hooted at him as he passed across the silent Park. "To-whoo! to-whoo! What an ass you are! To-whoo!" The wind in his face whispered it in his ears as he passed: "Ass! ass! ass!" And a low voice in the distance murmured unceasingly as he went along: "He might have had Miranda—Ass!" He got back to his cottage, —how grim and mean it looked, with its stone floor and its pine-wood table!—and found a letter from Alma.

"My dear frend"—(after all, it made very little matter whether she spelled properly or not. Philanthropy, marriage, harmony, mutual

respect, are things beyond the power of bad spelling to touch)—"My dear frend,—I have read the book which you lent me quite through. I will give it back to you to-morrow. I think I should like a storey-book better, if you will find me one. Father sends his love.

"Your affecshunate

"Alma."

Well: he taught her to call him her friend: she *had* read the book—one of Ruskin's shorter works; it was natural that she should like a story-book better than an essay; and it was also pleasant that she should add in her artless way, the love of her father. Stephen Bostock's love, and yet . . . . oh! the wrong hand, the wrong voice, the wrong woman.

He went to bed, and lay awake, thinking sadly of the future which stretched before him. He saw himself carrying a burden growing daily heavier. He saw the sweet eyes of Miranda resting upon him with sympathy, but they gradually sank out of sight and disappeared. And then he was left quite alone with his burden, which was a live woman,

struggling and fighting with him, and crying to go to Weyland Court.

Desdemona, for her part, began to think that in her professional career she had assisted at the construction of many a good drama of which the plot did not promise to be half so good as this story of Alan and Miranda. She had suggested many an ingenious situation, striking tableau, and astonishing *dénoûment* which the author had carried out in the book, and she on the boards. Now she had a plot to work out, the issues of which concerned the happiness of two people at least, not counting Alma.

To prophesy is all very well; but suppose it depends upon the prophet to bring about the fulfilment? Then it becomes embarrassing. What move should she take? Presently a thought occurred to her. It was as yet quite in the rough, but it was worth following up. And she sent for Tom Caledon, because he knew everybody and their history.

"Now, Tom," she said, "I want to have a confidential talk with you. Sit down, be patient, and tell me the exact truth, or help me to find it."

"Is it anything about Nelly and me?" asked Tom guiltily.

"No, egotistical boy—always thinking of yourself—it is not. It is about a much more important couple—about Alan and Miranda."

"Why—Alan is engaged to Alma Bostock."

"Please do not interrupt. The sagacity of men, when they do sometimes attempt to understand things, is sometimes too dreadful. Listen, I want to know all about Alma Bostock."

"All about Alma Bostock," Tom repeated; "as if anybody could ever know all about a girl."

"Do not be cynical, Tom. Men may learn quite as much about girls as is good for them to know. Let women have their little secrets if they like. However, I want to find out as many of Miss Alma Bostock's as I can."

"That seems an extensive order."

"First, what do you know about her?"

"Well, it's a good many years since I have been knocking about this part of the country, and I know most of the people in it——"

"Dear me! cannot the man come to the

point at once? Do you know Alma Bostock well?"

"Pretty well." Tom smiled. "Pretty well—I have spoken to her."

"Now tell me, Tom, what sort of a girl is she?"

"Comely," said Tom, "not to say alarmingly pretty. Alan has got one of the village beauties."

"Ah!" said Desdemona. "I suppose the other two are that black-haired young person whom we saw in the tent last week, and the statuesque-looking girl. Beauties of a kind; but, Tom, *do* you think it right—I ask you—to use the same word to describe Nelly Despard and Alma Bostock?"

"Never mind," said Tom, waiving the question. And indeed it must be owned that the masculine mind is far more catholic and comprehensive as regards beauty than the feminine. We need not be ostentatiously proud, however, of this superiority. "Never mind that," said Tom. "She is a pretty girl."

"Is she—I don't say a good girl—of course she is a good girl." Desdemona

paused a moment, as if she would receive with resignation an assurance to the contrary effect. "Of course she is a good girl," she repeated with emphasis, as such assurance did not come. "But is she a girl with any self-respect or dignity?"

Tom tried to look serious, but broke down and allowed a little smile to play about the corners of his mouth.

"Then I am to suppose that she is not," Desdemona said sharply.

"Indeed, I said nothing of the kind."

"Some girls of that class," his examiner went on with great persistency, "allow young gentlemen to kiss them. At least, I have heard rumours to that effect."

Here Tom fairly burst into a laugh.

"Oh!" said Desdemona. "Then I suppose that you are one of those who have already kissed this village maiden. Now, don't beat about the bush, Tom, but tell me everything."

"You really must not ask everything. I appeal to your generosity, Desdemona."

"I have none when the interests of Alan Dunlop are at stake. Tell me all, Tom."

"Well, then, if you must know—— I wonder what Nelly would say——"

"Nelly shall not know."

"If you do meet a pretty girl in a shady lane, and you do take toll as you pass—an innocent toll that really does no harm to anybody——"

"A country girl is only a toy to amuse a gentleman," said Desdemona a little bitterly. "Go on, Tom Caledon. Has this toll been often demanded and paid?"

"Pretty often, I dare say," he replied, with unblushing effrontery.

"I suppose whenever you met her. Shameful!"

"Well," said Tom, "if you come to that, Desdemona, I should like to know what you would have done if you had met her dancing along the way with her bright eyes and rosy cheeks, and her curls as gay as the flowers in June?"

"I should have boxed her ears," said the lady calmly. "I should certainly like to box her ears. A girl who lets one man kiss her will, of course, let a dozen. One understands that. But about herself—is she clever?"

"I should say no."

"Has she any education?"

"I should say none. Reads and writes. Reads love-stories and writes love-letters, no doubt, to Harry."

"What!" shrieked Desdemona. "Writes love-letters? To Harry?"

"She used to, I know, because Harry, who is as good a fellow as ever stepped, has often shown them to me. But, of course, she has left off now, and given Alan the benefit of all her thoughts."

"I see." Desdemona relapsed into silence. She was turning things over in her mind. This revelation about Harry was just the thing she wanted.

Tom went rambling on:

"She is good about the house, I believe: makes butter, looks after the cheese, and the cream, and the eggs—all that sort of thing. I've been in her dairy when her father and mother were away on market-day. It was quite Arcadian, I assure you. Made a fellow feel like a shepherd."

"Thank you, Tom; you have told me quite enough," said Desdemona. "That is

another remarkably stupid thing about men—that they never know when to stop when they do begin confessing. I suppose it comes of the amazing opinion they always have of their own importance. Do you know if she is fond of running about in the evening, or does she stay at home?"

"Why," said Tom, "of course she likes running about in the evening—they all do. She used to get out on one excuse or the other, and meet Harry at the bottom of the garden every night. I dare say she stays at home now, and listens to Alan. I should like to see him, with his solemn blue eyes, preaching to poor little Alma about the great and glorious mission she has to fulfil, while old Bostock pretends to enjoy the talk, thinking how to make something more out of it for himself. Perhaps poor old Harry is crying his eyes out at the bottom of the garden. He's just the sort of man to take things of this sort seriously; and if you've got nothing more to ask me, Desdemona, I will go and find him out, and see how he *does* take it."

Tom rose and took his hat.

"One moment, Tom," said Desdemona: "who is he, this Harry?"

"Why Cardew, one of Alan's gamekeepers, of course. Everybody always calls him Harry, and there can't be two Harrys about the place."

"What sort of man is he?"

"A tall handsome man, about my height, but better looking, and stronger. Just the sort of fellow to catch a girl's fancy."

"Yes; and is she the girl to keep a fancy in her head when once she has got one?"

"That I can hardly say. You see, Desdemona, my acquaintance with Alma Bostock is limited to the—the—little trifles I have communicated to you. Need I express a hope that they will not be mentioned before certain ears polite? I mean that perhaps Nelly, not to say Miranda, might not think the better of me. Now you, I know, will forgive these little trespasses, the knowledge of which has been, so to speak, wrung from me by a pressure equal to wild horses."

"I shall not talk about them, Tom. Of

course, it is of no use asking you to abstain in future from—taking toll?"

"On the contrary, as regards Alma," said Tom lightly, "all the use in the world; she belongs to Alan now."

"And before, she belonged to Harry the gamekeeper. Poor Harry!"

"Well, but Harry did not know; and what the eye does not see, the heart does not grieve for."

"Poor Harry!—again. But now, Tom, we come to the really serious part of the business. Do you like the idea of this marriage?"

"Like it! No! but I am not Alan's keeper."

"Then will you help me to prevent it?"

"I would help you if I could, Desdemona."

Tom became serious, and sat down again.

"Of course Alma is quite unworthy of him."

"We must look about us then, and invent something."

"Shall we take Nelly into confidence?"

"Tom, your weakness as regards that young lady is unworthy of you. The fewer

in our confidence the better. You and I are the only two, to begin with. Later on, perhaps, we may let gamekeeper Harry join us."

"Harry? Well, I leave it all to you. Only Nelly would have enjoyed it so much."

"Nelly is charming as she is pretty. But Nelly might enjoy it so much as to share her pleasure in the plan with somebody else. You must confine your confidence to me, if you please."

"Very well," said Tom, "though how you are going to manage things I cannot understand."

Desdemona rose from her chair, and began to walk about the room.

"I never thought you would understand," she replied, at one of the turns upon the stage.

She still preserved her stage manner—right to left, left to right—and swept her skirts behind her with a touch of the hand, as she turned, in her old familiar stage style.

"You see—stand up, sir, before the footlights, and face the audience—we are now at the end of Act the First, and this is the situation. Alan Dunlop is engaged to Alma

Bostock, being himself in love with Miranda."

"In love with Miranda? How do you know that?"

"Because I am a prophetess—before the audience—and when the curtain is down I am a dramatist. But it is true, Tom; and Miranda, though she will not confess it to herself, is in love with Alan. Your friend Harry is already engaged to this village maiden, who may be represented on the stage as artless and innocent. In real life she is vain, foolish, and designing, and Harry would be well rid of her. The girl herself, afraid of her stalwart rustic, afraid of her greedy and grasping father, afraid of her gentleman suitor, does not know what to do. The curtain falls upon the situation. Even the critics, who have left off applauding since poor old John Oxenford retired, are pleased with the tableau which ends the First Act, and the people are mad for what follows."

"And what does follow?"

"That we must devise for ourselves—you and I."

"But I am not a dramatist, Desdemona.

I don't believe I could write a play to save my life."

"You might, my dear Tom; but it would be a shocking bad one. All you have to do is to follow my instructions. It is a very strong comedy. The first act is, beyond everything, effective. It remains with us to improve upon it in the second and third. Up to the present I only half see my way to the second. And as to the third, all I see as yet is a wedding. There will be bells, but not for Alan and the village beauty; and a procession, but Alma will not occupy the leading place in it—at least, not the place she contemplates——"

"You are such a clever woman, Desdemona," said Tom, "that I should think you might construct another drama out of Nelly and me, and make it end, like the first, in a procession with bells, in which that fellow Exton shall not occupy the position he apparently contemplates."

"The old-fashioned plan was the best, Tom. The lover ran away with the girl, and made it up with her father afterwards."

Tom sighed, and withdrew.

Desdemona sat down, and reflected.

CHAPTER VII.

"We look before and after,
And pine for what is not."

THE keeper, young Harry Cardew, was spending a warm afternoon in the congenial gloom of his own cottage, where with his chin in his hand, and his elbow on the arm of his chair, he meditated in great bitterness. The rich man with exceeding many flocks and herds had come and stolen the one thing which was his, the little ewe-lamb. And he did not see how he should be able to get her back out of the hands of the spoiler.

Harry Cardew lives in this cottage alone. It was his father's before him, and his grandfather's before that—for he comes of a race of keepers. There is a floor of brick: the low ceiling, black with smoke and age, is crossed with a square beam of oak: his gun stands

beside him as if ready for immediate use—you may notice that the shoulder of his coat shows the rubbing of the gun : the furniture is like the ceiling for blackness, but it is strong and good. There are evidences everywhere of the keeper's trade : skins, dressed and prepared, of cats, foxes, squirrels, and even otters : there are feathers of birds : a box of handy tools : there is a new iron moletrap : and if you look out of the open window you will see nailed against the wall of the kennel rows of slaughtered vermin and carrion—weasel, stoat and polecat, kite and crow. Harry's dog, a sympathetic creature, albeit young and longing to be out in the fields, sits before him, watching his master with anxious eyes.

Presently the lovesick swain looked up as he heard a footstep, and saw Mr. Caledon leaping over the little streamlet which ran twenty yards in front of his door.

Tom looked about, and presently poked his head into the door and peered round in the dark.

"You there, Harry ?"

"Yes, Mr. Tom. Come in—I'm here."

Tom sat down in silence, and pulled out his cigar-case and began to smoke for company.

"You've heard the news, Harry?" he asked presently.

"Yes, Mr. Tom," the keeper replied with a sigh. "I've heard as much news as will do me for a long time."

Then there was silence again.

"We broke the sixpence together; see, Mr. Tom." He pulled out a black ribbon with the token suspended from it. "Here's my half, I wonder what she's done with hers."

"Have you seen her since Mr. Dunlop first spoke to her?"

"Yes; I seen her the very night he done it. She came out and met me. Well, you know, Mr. Tom, as a man will, I bounced; swore Mr. Dunlop should never marry her, nor no man but me should have her. But when I came away it was tairable hard on me. For bounce as I may, I can't see no way out of it."

Again Tom found the best course to be silence.

"For suppose," Harry continued—"suppose

I was to up and tell the Squire everything. How would that be? Either he'd send Alma away in a rage for deceiving of him—which deceit it is—or he'd maybe half believe, and then it would be bad for her and worse for me ever after, because of that half belief."

"That seems true enough," said Tom.

"Besides, there's another thing. Alma, she's kept on with me secret for a year and more. Nobody guessed it; nobody suspected it. Do you think it would be fair on the gal to split upon her, and ruin her beautiful chances?"

"Well, no," said Tom. "From your point of view it would not; and that seems a gentleman's point of view. But you don't want the marriage to come off?"

"Of course I don't, sir!"

"And you don't see your way to preventing it by telling the Squire?" Certainly some one else ought to tell him. You are not the only one, Harry, who would like to see the thing stopped. Lord Alwyne is one, I am another, the ladies at the Court would all rejoice to see it broken off. We shall do what we can. Keep up a good heart."

"I know Mr. Dunlop," said Harry. "When his word is once passed, there he abides. No, sir, it's no good. He has said he would marry Alma and he will—even if he knew that on the very first night of her engagement she came out to meet and kiss an old lover in the orchard; even if he were to find out her father in his tricks; even if he knew that all the village laughs at him and his carryings on for their good. Nothing would turn Mr. Alan from his word. Lord help you, Mr. Tom, I know him better than you. He's only a year younger than me. Many's the time we've been out in this wood looking for eggs—ah! little did we think then. Listen, Mr. Tom; I'll tell you what happened last night, because I must tell some one. I was down there coming up from the village under the trees, where the path leads from the Park. It was twelve o'clock. I'd got my gun. There was no one about, and I heard footsteps on the gravel. It was pretty dark under the trees, but light enough beyond, and I saw the Squire walking fast over the gravel. Presently he came under the trees, and then he sat down on a log, quite still, thinking.

He was within a couple of yards of me, and the devil came into my head. One shot and Alma would be free. No one to see me, no one to suspect me; because my place last night was on the t'other side in these preserves. One shot. Lord! it looked for a minute as if it was nothing—just nothing—to put the piece to your shoulder and pull the trigger."

Harry paused, and wiped his brow.

"Lord forbid I should ever be so near murder again! And while I might have done it—while the fit was on me, like—Mr. Alan got up, and went on his way home."

Tom laid his hand on his shoulder kindly.

"Don't have any more whisperings with the devil, Harry. They are dangerous things. Thank God no mischief came of that colloquy. Tell me, Harry, do you think she was fond of you?"

"What do we know, Mr. Tom? They say they are fond of us, and we believe them. It is all we have to go upon. If they tell lies, we can't help ourselves. If they carry on with gentlemen, we don't know."

Tom blushed, thinking guiltily of that little innocent toll we know of.

"If they say one thing to our faces and another behind our backs, what can we do? She said she was fond of me. There! I don't think gals know what a man's fondness means. They like to be made much of; and if one man isn't there, another 'll do just as well. I don't blame 'em, poor things. They don't know no better, and they can't understand a man's feelings."

"Perhaps," said Tom bitterly, thinking how most likely Nelly at this very moment was accepting the attentions of Mr. Exton. "I believe you are quite right, Harry—they don't understand. You are not the only man who can't marry the girl he loves."

"I suppose not," said Harry. "Why, there's yourself, Mr. Tom. Lord! I could never say a word about it to you before, but now it seems as if we were both in a boat together."

"Ay, Harry. I'm too poor, you know."

"What I shall do," said Harry, "is this. I shall wait on here till they're married; then I shall get out of the way. Alma lets me see her now, when it doesn't do much harm. But she's that hold upon me, Mr. Tom, that

if she was to lift up her finger to me when she was a married woman I should run after her, whether it was to the orchard of the farm or the garden of the Court. And think what a scandal and a wickedness that would be."

"Yes," said Tom, "that would be throwing more fat in the fire with a vengeance. You *had* better get out of the place, Harry, if you can make up your mind to go. And if Nelly becomes Mrs. Exton, I believe I will go to America with you. We can smoke pipes together, and swear at things in company."

So they sat enjoying the luxury of gloom all the afternoon, till Harry, looking at his watch, said he must go see after his young birds, and Tom lounged slowly away through the fir plantations that bordered Weyland Park on the east, in which lay the keeper's solitary cottage.

He was gloomy enough about himself, for there could be no doubt now of Exton's intentions concerning Nelly. He haunted her: he followed her about: he seemed to claim some sort of possession of her which made

Tom grind his teeth with rage. And he was sorry about his honest friend the keeper. He knew better than poor Harry what a shallow and frivolous young person this girl was on whom such a strength of affection and trust was lavished : he knew, too, what a dead failure her marriage with Alan would be, how utterly incapable she would prove of understanding or trying to understand the nobleness of his plans. So that in any case the outlook was dark. Just then, however, he was ready to view everything with foreboding eyes.

He told Desdemona something of Harry's trouble, and let out accidentally, because this intriguing dame pumped him as cleverly as a cross-examining counsel, that Alma had gone out to meet her lover on the very day of her engagement with Alan.

"The Second Act," said Desdemona, triumphant, "I consider to be as good as finished. And it ends well. However, there is the Third, which is always the most difficult."

CHAPTER VIII.

"Elle aima mieux pour s'en faire conter
Prêter l'oreille aux fleurettes du diable
Que d'être femme et non pas coqueter."

And it was then that the awful row occurred between Tom and Nelly which led to that Court of Love, the history of which has never till now been properly narrated.

It was in the morning, after breakfast; in fact, in the morning-room. No one was there but themselves.

"It makes me look ridiculous, Tom," she said, "to have you following me round with that doleful face."

"Whose fault is it if I am doleful?" he asked.

"Nobody's, except your own. You promised when I came that there should be no foolishness, and yet——" She stopped, with a look half of fun, half of vexation: "and

yet, if I so much as go out for a ride with Mr. Exton—and he rides very well——"

"Learned to ride of an acrobat, I believe," said Tom.

"You think only acrobats can ride better than you. Oh, Tom! what a very conceited thing to say! I believe too," she added thoughtfully, "that it is unchristian. But it is not only riding. Whatever I do, if Mr. Exton is with me, you come too, with your gloomy face, and spoil the sport."

"I dare say. I am not very jolly."

"The Sisters called you wrongly. They called you Brother Lancelot. It should have been Brother Killjoy. What harm does Mr. Exton do to you?"

"Every harm."

"Because he does his best to please me?"

"No; not that."

"Because he is a pleasant and amusing companion?"

"No; nor that."

"Then what, Tom?"

"As if you did not know, Nelly. Because it all means that he is ready to fall in love with you."

"Indeed, sir. Pray cannot a man——"

"Don't, Nell! What is sport to you is death to me!"

"I knew a Tom Caledon once," she said, picking a rose to pieces, "who did not grow sulky whenever I—chose—to—flirt a little with another man."

"And I knew a Nelly Despard once," he replied, "who when I asked her not to flirt with that other man, desisted, and kept her hand in by flirting with me. That was a great deal pleasanter, Nelly."

"So it was, Tom, I confess," she said, "much pleasanter for both of us; but then we were boy and girl."

"Two years ago."

"Now I am one-and-twenty and you are six-and-twenty, and we must think seriously about things."

"That means that Exton has got ten thousand a year."

"Mamma says so," said Nelly demurely.

"Oh! mamma has been writing about him again, has she?"

"Do you actually suppose," asked the girl,

with big eyes, "that mamma would let me stay here with no chaperon but Desdemona, without so much as finding out who was here? She knows *everybody*, and she has learned from some one how things are going on. I do not know who that some one is, but she is a true friend, Tom, to you as well as to me."

"How do you know that?"

"Because, Tom, mamma writes me as follows." She took out the letter and read a portion of it—"'braided with point-lace,'—no, that is not it—here it is—'And I am very glad, my dear child, truly glad to find that you have given up your foolish partiality for that penniless boy'—you, Tom—'and are now making good use of time which, though once wickedly thrown away upon an adventurer'—you, Tom—'may now be employed to the very best advantage. Mr. Exton, who is at the Abbey, and who, I rejoice to hear, quite appreciates my dear child, is said to have at least ten thousand a year. This may be exaggeration, but it points in the right direction. No doubt the other young man'—you, Tom—'has con-

soled himself with some other girl.' There, Tom; what do you think of that?"

Tom laughed.

"But it is barren comfort, Nelly," he said. "You soothe me and stroke me down, and then you go off to carry on with Exton."

"'Go off to carry on,'" she repeated. "What very remarkable English! Do you think the old Tom would have said such a thing?"

"Perhaps not, Nelly. The old Tom was a fool. He thought that when a girl said she loved him——"

"It was on Ryde Pier; it was ten o'clock and a moonlight night, and the band was playing; and the waters were smooth, and there were the lights on the yachts—and—and it was a new thing; and it was an unfair advantage to take."

"But you meant it then, Nell?"

She could not help it: she had that way with her. She lifted her soft heavy eyes, and met his.

"Yes, Tom, I meant it."

"And you mean it still?" he caught her hand. "Oh! Nelly, say you mean it still."

"I can't say it; not as you mean it, Tom, for oh! I am so much—so very much wiser. Two years ago I was only nineteen. I had been out for four or five months. I believed that mutton and beef grew on trees, I think. I had some lingering notion, though mamma did her best to eradicate it, that every well-dressed, handsome, pleasant man—like you, Tom—had plenty of money. Ah me! what a pleasant dream! Why could it not last?" She paused and collected herself. "And then came along a pleasant man—you, Tom—and stole away my heart. When it was gone I found out that it was sheer robbery on your part, and not exchange, as it ought to have been——"

"Exchange! Could you not take mine for yours?"

"Ah! Tom, that is the masculine error. The true exchange is—for a girl's heart, or hand, which is generally the same thing—an establishment. And that you could not give me."

"I've said over and over again that if seven hundred a year——"

"No, Tom, it won't do. Mamma is quite

right. For the first year, while the wedding presents are fresh, and the unpaid-for furniture new, no doubt we might get along. But oh! the misery of being in perpetual debt."

"And so I am thrown over, and that fellow Exton, with a face crinkled like a savoy cabbage, is chosen instead."

"Not chosen, Tom. He chooses me, perhaps. I do not choose him. I take him; I say yes to him, when you know I would rather say yes to some one else."

"Go on, Nelly," he replied sullenly. "Drive me half mad by confessing one thing and doing another. Tell me plainly, do you love him?"

"Whom?"

"Why, Exton, of course."

"No—of course."

"And yet—what are girls made of?"

"Sugar and spice, Tom, and all that's nice. *Il faut vivre.* When mamma dies there will be next to nothing for this poor child; while mamma lives there is not too much. This young lady has been brought up in ideas of what is *comme il faut*. She likes riding, she likes amusements, she likes balls and dinners,

garden-parties and dances. She would like, if she married, to see a steady prospect of making the most out of life. Now you can't make much, as a general rule, with seven hundred a year."

Tom groaned. He was bound to admit that you cannot. What thirty years ago would have been considered a fair younger son's portion, is now a miserable pittance, regarded from a matrimonial point of view. Tom was a younger son's only son, and seven hundred a year was considered in the family as a plentiful allowance for such a position.

"Could I have believed two years ago that Nelly would have been so worldly-minded?"

"Could I have believed two years ago that Tom would have been so Quixotic?"

After this double question there was silence—Tom walking backwards and forwards, Nelly sitting on a couch pulling flowers to pieces with an angry flush in her cheek. Woman-like, she was ready to give in and own that she was wrong; and woman-like, she could not forbear from the strife of words, the contest for the last word.

"You take his presents," said Tom, like an accusing angel.

"I have taken yours," replied Nelly; as much as to say that the two cases were equal.

"Yes; but you let me tell you that I loved you," Tom pleaded.

"What has that got to do with it? Perhaps Mr. Exton has told me the same thing."

"And you have listened? You let him make love to you after all that has passed between us?"

"Two years ago, Tom. And, as I said before, a moonlight evening on Ryde Pier in August is hardly the time for a young maiden of nineteen to make any violent resistance. And, do you know, I think you have hardly any right, have you, to object to what Mr. Exton says to me?"

As a matter of fact, Mr. Exton had not declared love to her at all, and it was a very strange thing, considering the opportunities he had, that he did not. Nelly, more than half afraid, expected some sort of declaration every day.

Right? Tom had no right. Nelly knew

that this was her trump card, her dagger which stabbed Tom to the heart. He had no right!

"Poor Tom!" she said, timidly looking up at him. "Poor Tom! It is a shame to say such things."

"Say what you like," he cried. "Henceforth there is an end. Flirt, coquette as much as you please. Be all smiles to one man and honey-sweet to another, and mean nothing to either. That is the way of all womankind, I suppose. I've done with you, Miss Despard."

He hurried away with the step of desperation.

Nelly shook her head with a smile, and as she performed this act of incredulity, a tear dropped from her eye upon her cheek, and glittered in the warm light.

And then the hated rival appeared—no other than Mr. Roger Exton himself.

"They are going to have a meeting of their Madrigal Union in the garden. Will you come? I met Tom Caledon going away in a hurry. Have you quarrelled?"

"I never quarrel with Tom," said Nelly proudly.

"He looked agitated. Poor Brother Lancelot! I felt for him. What, I thought, if she were to treat me in the same cruel fashion?"

She went with him to the garden, and he spread a cloth on the grass, and laid himself leisurely at her feet, just about a yard from them, in fact. He wore a straw hat and a complete suit of white, and looked absolutely cool.

"They've got iced-cup indoors somewhere," he said; "but I remembered that you like the garden in the morning, so I left the cup, and got the madrigal people to come here. What a perfectly charming old garden it is! Reminds me of a place I once saw in Nepaul. It wants half-an-hour to the meeting. Half-an-hour to ourselves in this delicious atmosphere, with that mignonette bed within easy hail, Tom Caledon gone off in disgrace, and the opportunity of telling you, Nelly, what a perfectly charming girl you are."

That was all he told her. What an extraordinary thing that he did not propose!

Tom blundered in his flight upon Desdemona, who stopped him and made him give her his arm. He was furious, and she saw it, guessing the cause; but she let him alone, waiting till he should speak.

This was not until he reached her room, when he sat down, and ejaculated reproaches upon womankind in general.

"That means," said Desdemona, "that you have quarrelled with Nelly."

Tom declared that nothing, nothing in the world, would induce him ever to speak to Nelly again; that she was heartless and worldly; that she took presents from two men at the same time; and so on.

Desdemona heard him to the end.

"This seems to me," she said, "to come under one of the leading cases and precedents of the Assises d'Amour. I shall refer it to Miranda, and we will have a Court of Love."

CHAPTER IX.

"The Shepherds and the Nymphs were seen
Pleading before the Cyprian Queen."

THE Court of Love was summoned by order of the Abbess.

As this, curiously enough, was the first of such Courts which had been held in England since the days of the lamented Queen Eleanour of Provence, Desdemona was extremely anxious that it should be held with as much external splendour as the resources of the Abbey would admit, and that its procedure should show no diminution in the knowledge, practices, and authority of the Golden Code. It might not, she said, become a leading case: there had been other causes tried at which points of more vital interest were at stake; but the case of Lancelot *v.* Rosalind would, she

was sure, prove one of no small importance. And its externals, she promised, should be in every way worthy of the issue to be decided.

As no one except the plaintiff, the defendant, and Desdemona herself, knew the least in the world what this issue was; as most people, outside the Abbey at least, regarded the impending trial as a sort of amateur breach of promise case, and wondered how Nelly Despard or any other girl *could*—a most meaning phrase, full of all insinuation, accusation, envy, and jealousy: and as it was rapidly spread abroad that the preparations were on a scale of unusual magnificence: as no one was old enough to remember the Courts of Queen Eleanour: as even in the Abbey the performers had very little idea what the show would be like—there was great, even extraordinary excitement over the impending Court.

It was called for five o'clock in the afternoon, and was to be held in the ancient garden of the abbey, which, as has already been stated, consisted of an oblong lawn, planted with roses and flower-beds, and surrounded on all sides by two terraces. It was

also protected from north and east winds by a high and extremely thick hedge, lying open to the more genial influences of south and west. There was no great elm in the garden, beneath which, as was *de rigueur* in the old *gieux sous l'orme*, the *grandes dames de par le monde* might shelter themselves, while they heard the pleadings, from the scorching sun of July; but there was over the northern end a great walnut, as stately as any of those which adorn the shaven lawns of Cambridge. In front of the walnut stood a fountain, and beyond the fountain was the old sundial. The garden itself was kept apart for the Court, but on the terraces a long awning had been rigged up, under which were ranged rows of chairs for the spectators, because in the Abbey of Thelema there was nothing done which was not open to all the world. No hiding of lights behind bushels in that monastery, if you please. So far it is very, very unlike the cages of the Ile Sonnante, the birds in which, as the good *curé* of Meudon tells us, began life by being mourners at funerals. If the doings of Sister Rosalind, or any other Sister, were to be dragged into the open light of a Court of

Law, that Sister would like the Court to be as numerously attended as possible. On this ground the fair defendant had no cause for complaint. As regards the ceremonies, they were unreservedly entrusted to the care of Desdemona; the Brethren who were to take part were content with learning each his own *rôle* and place, and to leave the rest to their stage manager. There was not even a dress rehearsal: there was not even a full undress rehearsal: there were only a few interviews between the dictatress and her company. She had the working up of all the details: she had to contrive the costumes, the properties, the tableaux, and the grouping. This, indeed, was her great delight. She drew little pictures of her Court while yet it had no existence outside her brain; she sat in the quaint old garden and peopled it with the puppets of her imagination: when everything and everybody had their proper place on the lawn and she had drawn her plan of the whole, she began by instructing the servants ushers of the Court; then she took the boys, who helped in the choir and acted as pages for the Functions, into the garden, and with

the aid of a few chairs taught them exactly where they were to stand, and how they were to pose: then she drew up a plan of the action of her piece, with full stage directions for everybody; and had this copied, recopied, and corrected till she was perfectly satisfied. Then she distributed the parts. And then she sat down and heaved a great sigh and thanked the fates that an excellent piece was set afoot.

The principal part of a play may seem to an outsider to be the words. Not at all: the actor knows very well that the words are only introduced to set off the situations; and that many most excellent plays, especially those written for the Mediæval stage, consisted of nothing but situations when they left the dramatist's hand, the words being left entirely to the mother-wit of the players. In fact, they were all "gag;" and, as everybody knows, the situation is the only difficult thing to find.

"You have to plead your cause in person," Desdemona said to Tom Caledon, concluding her instructions. "Very well: plead it eloquently. On your pleading as you open the

case will greatly depend the success of the piece—of course, I mean the success of your cause."

"Desdemona, I am too stupid. I *can't* write a speech. You must write it for me," said Tom. "And it seems such a shame accusing Nelly."

Sister Rosalind's advocate was Brother Peregrine. He asked for no help except access to the ancient constitutions and code of Love, which Desdemona readily gave him.

As for the costumes, they were, out of respect to the memory of Queen Eleanour, deceased, those of the twelfth century, and were designed by Desdemona in consultation with certain experienced persons, lent by Mr. Hollinghead, from the Gaiety Theatre. Those of the ladies were made out of what appeared to them the best imitation possible of the favourite materials of the period, which, as everybody knows, were samite, siglaton, and sandal. A full description of the dresses appeared in the *Queen* the following week. It was written by a lady for ladies, and those who wish for precise details may refer to that paper. Speaking from a masculine, but not,

it is hoped, an unobservant point of view, I should say in general terms that the dresses fitted tightly to the figure, after the present graceful fashion ; but were not drawn in at the feet, so as to make the wearers appear unable to walk with freedom. The hair was worn in long and flowing tresses or else gathered up in a net, but not the ugly net which we remember to have seen in youth and sometimes yet see on ladies of a certain rank of life, those who dwell around the New Cut, Leather Lane, or the High Street, Whitechapel. On the head was worn a square coronet of gold, and the Sisters were wrapped in crimson mantles, falling over the soft grey dress beneath. Their shoes were long and pointed, looped up with chains, and with low heels : their gloves were gauntlets, with any number of buttons, were grey like the dresses, and covered more than half the arm.

As for the men, the colours of their tunics were more various, because each chose what liked him best ; they, too, wore long mantles or cloaks, which had capuchons ; they carried daggers in their belts, and their shoes, like those of the Sisters, were long, with points

looped up to the knee. They wore no swords, things which six hundred years ago belonged to the heavy armour, and were only put on for outdoor use. Within doors, if you wanted to stick anything into a friend over a bottle, or a game of chess, the dagger was much handier.

As regards both Brothers and Sisters, they were so practised in *bals-masqués*, theatricals, and frivolities of such kinds, that they had arrived at the singular and enviable power of moving about in any costume with the air of belonging to it. It was acting without effort.

An hour before five all the chairs on the terraces were occupied. There was a party from the Vicarage; a few men brought down from town by Lord Alwyne; a party from the city of Athelston, and people from the country houses round, who all came by invitation. And about half-past four the Thelemites began one by one to drop in, till the garden space in the centre was crowded with them, with the ushers, the servants of the Court, and the page-boys.

"I should like," said Lucy Corrington to

Lord Alwyne, "to have lived in the twelfth century."

He shook his head.

"Best enjoy the present, Lucy. It would have been all over six hundred years ago, think of that."

It was, however, a very pretty and novel spectacle. Beneath the umbrageous foliage of the walnut-tree stood the Throne, a canopied seat on a platform, covered with crimson velvet. Chairs, also crimson covered, stood at either side of the Throne on the platform, for the Sisters who were to act as jury or assessors. The Sisters themselves were among the Brothers in what may be called the body of the Court. Below the Throne was the table of the Clerk to the Court, Sister Desdemona, and in front of her table two stools for the Assistant-Clerks. A table, covered with parchments, great ink-stands, and quill pens, was placed between the fountain and the throne; and, at the right hand and the left stood two small desks or pulpits for the counsel in the case, while the fair defendant was to be placed in a low chair of red velvet beside her advocate. All the

Abbey servants were there, dressed for the part—both those who regularly performed in the festivals and others, of whom it was suspected that Desdemona imported them for the occasion, as trained supers. The band was at the lower end of the garden discoursing sweet music, and with them stood, or lounged, the boys whom Desdemona had attired daintily in tight tunics. They were so well trained that they could look at each other without grinning, and could stand or lie about upon the grass in perfect unconsciousness that they were not assisting, in the heart of the twelfth century, at a serious and solemn trial before the High Court of Love. And the fountain sparkled in the sunshine; and the summer air was heavy with the perfume of flowers; and the Brethren were young; and the Sisters fair.

Not all the members of the Order were there. Brothers Lancelot and Peregrine; Sisters Miranda, Desdemona, and Rosalind were absent; that was natural, as they were the principal actors in the case to be tried. Also, Alan Dunlop was absent. He, poor man, was engaged in the village, giving his

usual afternoon lesson in social economy to Alma Bostock. While he talked, she, who would much rather have been milking the cows, or making the butter, or gathering ripe gooseberries, or stealing a surreptitious talk with Harry, or even granting an interview to Tom Caledon, listened with lack-lustre eye and lips that ever and anon drooped with the semblance of a yawn, to a cascade of words which had no meaning, not the shadow of a meaning to her. They had, however, to be endured to gratify this extraordinary lover, who, somehow, seemed to take pleasure in pouring them out. And while the girl's thoughts wandered away from the discourse, it must be owned that her *fiancée* himself was thinking how very, very much pleasanter it would have been to spend the day assisting at the Court of Love.

Another Brother of the Order was absent. It was Mr. Paul Rondelet. He said, on being invited by Desdemona, that he should have liked much to take his part, but that it had already been decided by the greatest German authority that there never were such things as Courts of Love; that all the contemporary

poets and painters were in a league to mystify people, and to make a pretence for posterity about a code of laws which did not exist; and that—here he laid his head plaintively on one side—he *must* consider the Common Room of Lothian and his own reputation. There might be Oxford men present. It is a special mark of the great and illustrious school of Prigs that, in virtue of being so much in advance of other people, they always know exactly how much has been discovered and decided in history, literature and art. For them the *dernier mot* has always been said, and generally by one whom the Prigs have consented to honour. So Mr. Rondelet remained aloof and stayed at home in the Abbey, shaping a new poem, in which a young man—it might have been himself—laments his exceeding great wisdom, which shuts him out from love, friendship, and the ordinary ambitions of life, deprives him of the consolations of religion, and leaves him alone, save perhaps for the Common Room of Lothian. He sent this poem to his friends, and they still carry it about with them, for it is as yet unpublished, cuddled up

tight to their hearts. The show proceeded in spite of these two absent Brothers.

At a quarter to five the band stopped playing, and shut their books. Then there was a little movement, and a rustle, and an expectant whisper. Only fifteen minutes to wait. And it seemed quite natural and in keeping with the character of the piece when Sister Cecilia, taking a zither, as good a substitute for a lute as can be devised, sang, sitting on the grass-bank, while the long branches of the walnut made a greenery above her head, the "Ballad of Blinded Love":

"Love goes singing along the way:
'Men have blinded and covered my eyes;
I have no night and I have no day,
Dark is the road and black the skies.'
Then Love laughs and fleers as he flies:
'See the maidens who've looked on me,
Sitting in sorrow with tears and sighs:
Better have let Love's eyes go free.'

"Still, he has ears: and where the gay
Songs and laughter of girls arise
(Music as sweet as flowers in May)
Straight to their hearts Love's arrow flies
Then the music of laughter dies:
Farewell song and innocent glee.
'Not my fault,' the archer cries,
'Better have let Love's eyes go free.'

"Not Love's fault: and who shall say,
Could we but leave him his pretty eyes,
Whom he would spare of the maidens gay,
Whom he would leave in the girlish guise?
Yet 'twere pity should beauty's sighs
Cause her flowers ungathered be:
With silken bandage cover his eyes,
Never let *that* boy's sight go free.

ENVOI.

"Prince, the shaft of his arrow flies
Straight to the heart of her and thee.
Take no pity, although he cries,
'Better have let Love's eyes go free.'"

Hardly had she finished the last bars of the ballad, when five struck from the Abbey clock, and, at the moment, the trumpets blared a note of warning, and every one sprang to his feet. "Oyez, oyez!" cried the usher; "silence for the Court."

First came the javelin-men, armed with long pikes and dressed in leathern jerkins, with straw round their legs instead of stockings. Desdemona afterwards prided herself on her fidelity in the detail of the straw, but Miranda thought it looked untidy. After the javelin-men came the clerks and people of the long robe, bearing papers. These wore the square cap of office, and the black

gown with full sleeves. After the lawyers, came, similarly attired in black, Tom Caledon, the Brother who was to act as plaintiff. Two clerks came after him, bearing the *pièces de conviction* on a cushion—gloves, flowers, ribbons, and perfume. And then, leading *la belle accusée* by the hand, came Brother Peregrine, also disguised as an advocate. He had assumed an air of the greatest sympathy, as if so much unmerited misfortune called forth the tenderest pity: he seemed to watch every step of his client, and to be ready at any moment to catch her in his arms if she should faint away. Nelly, who thus came to answer the charge of *lèse-majesté* against Love, was wrapped from head to foot in a long cloak of grey silk, the hood of which fell over her face, so that nothing was visible save when, now and again, she half lifted it to snatch a hasty glance at the Court and perhaps to see what people thought of the effect. That, indeed, produced by her grey robe, her drooping head, and her slender graceful figure, was entirely one of innocence wrongfully defamed, and conscious of virtue. After the accused came the secretaries of the

Court, and these were followed by Desdemona, who wore, for the occasion, such an expression as she had once imparted in her youthful and lovely days to the advocate Portia, and such a robe as the one which had in that representation enwrapped her charms. She was the Clerk of the Court. Lastly, her train borne by two pages, and led by Brother Bayard, the most courtly of the Brethren, came Miranda herself, supreme Judge and President of the Court of Love. She mounted the platform, and then, standing erect and statuesque, her clear and noble features touched with the soft reflection from the crimson canopy, and her tall figure standing out against the setting of greenery behind her, like Diana among her maidens, she looked round for a moment, smiled, and took her seat.

All were now in their places. In the chairs round the Throne sat the Sisters expectant; at their feet lay the page-boys, who were the messengers of the Court; at the tables sat the clerks, secretaries, and the lawyers, turning over the pages of the great volumes bound in vellum, and making industrious

notes. Sister Rosalind, the defendant, was in her place, beside her counsel; and Brother Lancelot, who wore, to tell the truth, a shamefaced and even a downcast look, as if he was in a false position and felt it, was at his desk opposite her.

When the Court was seated, there was another blare of trumpets, and the usher cried again, "Oyez, oyez! silence for the Court."

Then Desdemona rose solemnly, a parchment in her hand.

"Let the defendant stand," ordered the Judge.

Brother Peregrine, in a mere ecstasy of sympathy, offered his hand to the victim; at sight of which Tom forgot that he was plaintiff, and rushed from his post too to offer assistance. The Court, except Desdemona, who thought this very irregular, and Miranda, who would not lower the dignity of her position by so much as a smile, laughed aloud at this accident. But Sister Rosalind, pulling her hood lower over her face, took the hand of her own counsel without the least recognition of the plaintiff's proffered aid. And

Tom retreated to his place in confusion. Desdemona read the charge.

"Sister Rosalind," she began, in deep and sonorous tones, and with that clear accent which only long practice on the stage seems able to give—"Sister Rosalind, you stand before the Lady Miranda, President of this most venerable Court of Love, charged by the honourable and worthy Brother Lancelot, Monk of the Order of Thelema, with having wantonly, maliciously, wilfully, and perversely infringed the code of laws which governs the hearts of the young and the courteous, in that you have both openly and secretly, before the eyes of the Brothers and Sisters, or in the retreat of garden or conservatory, accepted and received those presents, tokens of affection, and attentions, both those ordinary—such as every knight, damoiseau, and Brother of Thelema is bound to bestow upon every damoiselle and Sister of the Order—and those extraordinary, such as, with loyal suit, service and devotion, one alone should render unto one. Do you, Sister Rosalind, plead guilty to this charge, or not guilty?"

Sister Rosalind, for answer, threw back her hood, and stood bareheaded before them all. With her soft eyes, which lifted for a moment to look round upon the Court and the audience on the terrace, her fair and delicate cheek and the half-parted lips which seemed as if they could plead more eloquently than any advocate, she carried away the sympathies of all. Phryne obtained a verdict by her beauty, without a word. So Sister Rosalind, by the mere unveiling of her face, would at once, but for the stern exigencies of the law, have been unanimously acquitted. There was a murmur of admiration from the audience on the terrace, and then, Lord Alwyne leading the way, a rapturous burst of applause, which was instantly checked by the Court, who threatened to hear the case with closed doors, so to speak, on the repetition of such unseemly interruption.

"My client," said Peregrine, "my calumniated client," here his voice broke down as if with a sob, "pleads not guilty, according to the Code of Love. And she desires also to set up a counter charge against the plaintiff

in the case, Brother Lancelot, in that, being attached to her and an aspirant for her favours, he has shown himself of late days of melancholy and morose disposition, and while he was formerly gay, cheerful, and of a light heart so that it was pleasant to accept his suit and service, he has now become sad and desponding, an offence contrary to all known and recognised *devoirs* of a lover. And she begs that the two charges may be tried together."

This startling charge, accompanied as it was by a reproachful look from the defendant, disconcerted Brother Lancelot exceedingly, insomuch that his eyes remained staring wide open and his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. The Court smiled, and Sister Desdemona recognising in this stroke a touch of real genius, nodded approvingly to Brother Peregrine.

Then Miranda spoke.

"It is within my learned brother's right," she said, "to set up a counter-charge, and the Court will not fail to insist upon giving the charge full weight. Meantime we will proceed with the original case as it stands

set forth upon the roll. Brother Lancelot, you will call your witnesses."

But the counsel for the defence again sprang to his feet.

"I am instructed by my client—my most deeply injured client—to admit the truth of the facts alleged. She *has* accepted the presents and the service of more than one Brother of this illustrious Order. My Lady and Sisters-assistant we admit, not as a fault, but rather as a virtue, that the facts are such as my learned Brother Lancelot has alleged in his plaint. I myself, my Lady, if for one moment I may be allowed to forget—no, not to forget my most needlessly persecuted client, which would be impossible—but to associate my poor personality with this admission, own before you all that I myself, humble as I stand, have been allowed to offer a faint tribute to this incomparable shrine of beauty and of grace. She has worn flowers in her hair which these unworthy fingers have gathered in this garden of Thelema and in its conservatories; she has honoured me and conferred a new beauty on those flowers by wearing them in her hair;

she has accepted gloves of me, gloves——" here the speaker clasped his hands and gazed heavenward, "gloves — sixes — and honoured the giver by wearing these sixes—small sixes—at our dances. My client has nothing to conceal, nothing that need not be told openly. We may, therefore, my Lady and Sisters-assistant of this honourable Court, enable my learned Brother to do without witnesses and to proceed at once with his vain and impotent attempt to substantiate his charge by appeal to ancient and prescriptive law."

Brother Peregrine sat down after this fling at his opponent.

Sister Rosalind pulled the hood lower over her face and resumed her seat. There was a silence of great expectation when Brother Lancelot rose to his feet, and after fumbling among his papers began, in a voice of great trepidation and hesitancy which gradually disappeared as he warmed to his work, his speech for the prosecution.

"My Lady and worshipful Sisters-assistant of this illustrious Court, it has been the laudable practice among all loyal followers of

honourable Love to discuss among themselves whatever points of difficulty may arise in the relations of lovers to one another. Thus we find in the Reports, meagre as these documents are, of the *jeux partis* lines of conduct laid down to meet almost every conceivable case, however knotty. These friendly discussions served to supplement and emphasise the Golden Code much as precedents in English law do grace, garnish, and sometimes obscure the mere letter of the law which lies behind them. Of such a nature was that famous discussion on the question whether, if a knight loves a lady he ought rather to see her dead than married to another? Such, again, was the case argued before a noble company of knights, dames, and demoiselles, whether a certain knight was justified in accepting an offer made to him by a lady that she would belong wholly to him provided first she might be allowed a clear twelvemonth of flirtation. And such, to quote a third case, was the memorable inquiry into the reason why the old, and therefore the experienced, are generally neglected; while the young, and there-

fore the inexperienced, are preferred. Had the present case before the Court been of such a nature as to admit of its decision by a *jeu parti* or by formal committee of arbitration, I should have preferred that course. But that is not so, and I am therefore prepared, most unwillingly, to prove that a Sister of our Order, a Sister to whom my own devotion has been offered and freely given, has infringed the miraculous Code which has been, and will ever continue to be, the foundation of constitutional Love."

He paused, while one of his clerks handed him a prodigious roll of parchment.

"I now, my Lady, proceed to refer to the articles which I maintain to have been infringed by our Sister the defendant in this suit. I shall be happy to furnish my learned Brother" —Tom was plucking up his courage—"with a copy of these statutes and ordinances, so that he may correct me if I quote them wrongly, and at the same time lead him to reflect whether even at the last moment he may not feel it his duty to advise his fair client to throw herself upon the mercy of the Court."

Here Brother Peregrine sprang to his feet and bowed courteously.

"I thank my learned Brother. I need, however, no copy of the Code. It is implanted here."

He smote the place where he supposed his heart to be and sat down.

"I will then," continued the counsel for the prosecution, "I will at once refer the Court and the Ladies-assistant to the very third Law—of such vital importance did this great principle seem to the supernatural framers of the Code. In the very third Law we have it enunciated in the clearest terms '*Nemo duplici amore ligari potest.*' That is to say, no one either knight or dame, damoiseau or damoiselle, can be bound by the chains of a two-fold affection. The object of a lady's preference may perhaps be changed; one can imagine the case of a damoiselle after being attracted by supposed virtues in a new friend—reverting with pleasure to the proved and tried chevalier who has obeyed her behests, it may be, for years"—here there was a murmur of sympathy, every one present being perfectly acquainted with Tom's sad history. Brother Peregrine looked round sharply, as much as to say, "Let

no one be led astray by any feeling of sentiment. I will make mincemeat of him directly."

"This, I say, one can comprehend, and in such a case the devotion of the previously favoured lover would be declined with such courtesy as becomes a gentlewoman. But let this Court picture to themselves a case in which a lady shall look with equal favour on the prayers of one and the sighs of another, shall smile on one with the same kindness as on the other, and ask whether both in letter and in spirit the third article of the Code would not be flagrantly contravened? And such a case it is which my sense of duty now obliges me to bring before your attention. I am aware—that is, I can anticipate, that my learned Brother for the defence will attempt to rely upon the Thirty-first Article—*unam fœminam nihil prohibet à duobus amari*—nothing prevents the lady from having two lovers at once. No one, I am sure, would be surprised to hear that the Sister Rosalind had as many lovers as there are men who have seen her."

Here the defendant lifted up a corner of her veil and bestowed a smile upon the coun-

sel. The audience laughed and Desdemona was about to call attention to this breach of official etiquette, when Tom proceeded with his speech.

"That clause, I contend, has nothing to do with the charge. The facts, as the Court has been informed, are not denied, but admitted. My learned Brother has confessed——"

Here Brother Peregrine sprang to his feet.

"I cannot allow the word confessed to pass unchallenged. My Lady, I have confessed nothing. Confession implies guilt. Where there has been no sin there can be no confession. We accept statements, but we do not confess."

"Let us say, then," continued Tom, "that he has accepted my statements. He has, in fact, accepted the statement that Sister Rosalind received the service and the presents of two aspirants. He has informed the Court that he has himself offered gloves—small sixes—which were graciously received. I too have offered gloves—also small sixes. It has been my pride as well as his, to see those sixes worn at our dances and in our drives and rides. I too have offered the

flowers of Thelema to her who is to me the choicest and fairest flower in this our garden of all delights. My incense has been burnt at that shrine, my vows have been laid before that altar, as well as his. If my learned Brother accepts statements, he must accept them in their fulness: they are not to be glossed over, cleared away, or pared down to a mere nothing at all. The Court must give these facts their full significance. It amounts to this, that the defendant in this action has received with equal favour the pretensions of those who follow her with an equal—no, that cannot be—*not* an equal affection. No personal feeling of rancour or jealousy, no unworthy desire for notoriety, fame, or revenge, has prompted me in bringing about this important trial. It has been appointed by yourself, my Lady, acting on the counsels of the experienced Clerk of this Court. You will, with your Sisters-assistant, give the case a calm and impartial consideration; you will remember the dangers which lurk behind the infringement of these Laws; you will act so as to preserve intact the Republic of Thelema; you will give no encouragement to conduct which

might implant in the midst of this happy retreat the seeds of jealousies, envies, and distractions, such as would make our Abbey no better than the outer world; you will prevent this generation of false hopes, this building up of delusive confidences, with the unhappiness of the final destruction of a faith built upon the sand. These things are not unreal. You will, my Lady, call upon your Sisters-assistant to ask their own hearts as well as the Code of Love. No Code, indeed, ever yet was invented which could meet the exigencies of every case. As regards the counter-charge, I confess I was not prepared for it. I may, perhaps, set an example to my learned Brother, by at once throwing myself upon the mercies of the Court. I confess, and do not deny, that there have been times when disappointment or grief at the conduct of my mistress has prevented the possibility of that cheerful demeanour and gaiety of heart which are the duty of every aspirant to Love. To this charge I plead guilty, and urge in extenuation the grievous provocation which I have received.

"Ladies of this most honourable Court"—the advocate raised his head, which he had

dropped in shame during the last few sentences, and looked around with a proud and confident bearing—"I leave my case fearlessly in your hands, confident that justice will be done, and, although I am sure that it is unnecessary, I venture beforehand to recommend the defendant to your favourable merciful consideration. She is young, as you all know; she is beautiful, as you all know; she is charming, as you will all agree; she is gracious and winning, even among the gracious and winning ladies of this illustrious House of Thelema. On these grounds, ladies, and on these alone, I pray that her offence may be condoned, and that she escape with such an admonition as our Lady Abbess may think fit to bestow upon her."

Brother Lancelot, who acquitted himself at the end of his speech far better than at the beginning, sat down. There was just that touch of real personal feeling in his peroration which gave the trial, even for those among the spectators who had small sympathy with the Code of Love, a genuine interest. It was clear that poor Tom, who, indeed, never disguised the fact, was in real

love with Nelly, whatever might be the feeling of the other man. There was a murmur among the people in the terrace which broke into loud applause.

"Si—lence!" cried the usher. "Silence in the Court."

Miranda here remarked that it was the second time this unseemly manifestation of feeling had been repressed; that if it occurred again she should commit the whole of the visitors for contempt of Court, without the power of appeal. She reminded the offenders that such a sentence entailed their exclusion from the Abbey and their confinement in the large prison of the outer world, among quite disagreeable and even vulgar people, until they should be purged of their contempt. A shudder, visible to the naked eye, ran through the crowded chairs at this dreadful threat.

Miranda then invited the counsel for the defence to say what he had to say.

Brother Peregrine rose immediately, and, after pulling his gown well over his shoulders, adjusting his square cap and clearing his throat, assumed a pose which was rather one of defiance than of appeal, and began his

oration without notes of any kind, with a rapid volubility in strong contrast to the hesitation and difficulty with which his opponent began his speech. I am inclined to believe that Tom's speech was written for him by Desdemona, but that he altered and amended the close. On the other hand, Brother Peregrine's address was undoubtedly all his own. There was a cold glitter about it which held the attention, but it was forensic to the last degree, and lacked the personality and feeling which characterised the speech for the prosecution.

"I stand here," he said, in an easy rapid way which showed how little the responsibility of the position weighed upon him—"I stand here engaged in the most arduous, because the most responsible, of all tasks. I defend a lady from a charge which, in this illustrious Abbey of Thelema, might almost be construed into an imputation—my learned Brother need not rush into denials—I say almost an imputation upon a reputation as deservedly spotless as the white evening dress in which my client wins all hearts. My learned Brother, whose conscience, I rejoiced

to observe, overcame the recklessness with which he started, so that from an accuser he became an advocate, rightly mentioned one or two leading cases decided long ago in the Courts of our ancestors. It is interesting and, indeed, instructive, to be reminded of these leading cases, even although they have no bearing upon the case before the Court. Still, it is well to know that those who plead in these Courts are learned in the law. But my learned Brother omitted to mention those cases which actually bear upon the question before us. Ladies and most honourable Sisters, we must not for a moment allow ourselves to lose sight of the fact that the point raised touches every one of you. Nothing can be more important, no cases have been more frequent, than those which concern the conduct of a lady towards her lover or lovers. It has been asked, for instance, whether the lover should prefer that the lady should first kiss him, or that he should first kiss the lady. The question is one on which much discussion could even now be raised, and doubtless there would be differences of opinion. It has been asked—and this is a question which

actually touches the present case"—here Brother Peregrine looked at his papers and picked out one from the handful which he held—"It has been asked whether, if a lady has to listen to a tale of love which she is about to refuse, she is justified in hearing her lover to an end, or whether, in justice, she should cut him short in the beginning? I need not remind your Ladyship and the Court that the decision in this case was in favour of hearing the poor man to an end. And I humbly submit that the decision was guided partly out of respect to that instinct of kindness in woman's heart which naturally prompts to the hearing of all that could be urged, and partly, if one may venture to say so in such a presence, from a natural desire to know how this man in particular would put his points." Here the Court smiled, as if both the President and the Sisters-assistant had large experience in such matters.

"First, then, Ladies and Sisters of the Honourable Order of Thelema, ought a demoiselle to have two lovers? Surely; that is granted by the very first laws in our Code. But, my learned friend may say, she ought

to show favour to one only. In the end, I grant. That is the real point at issue between us. In the end. Up to the present, my client, my fair, my beautiful, my much injured client, has only granted the simple favour of receiving such slight attentions, such little presents of flowers or ribbons or gloves as belong to the general usages of society and the broader and less conventional customs of Thelema. In the end, I say. But at present we are only beginning. My learned Brother, like myself, is, as one may say, in the humility of early love. What says the *trouveresse?*

> "'Humbly that lover ought to speak,
> Who favour from his love doth seek.'

My contention——"

"Do you," interrupted Miranda—"Do you confine yourself to the Code?"

"I do," replied the learned counsel. "But the Code is illustrated, explained and annotated by the *jeux-partis*, as my learned brother has already explained. Still, if one must abandon precedents and fall back upon the letter of the law, I will, if you please, take the Code itself, and prove, clause by clause,

if necessary, that my injured, my deeply injured client, has confined her operations, if I may so use the word, strictly within the limits of the Code—"

Here he received, from one of his clerks, a document in official writing.

"I was about to remark," he went on, "when I was interrupted by my clerk, that the Code itself will triumphantly bear out my client, and prove that she has been no traitor to those glorious laws of love which must, to the crack of doom, rule every lover in gentlehood. Let me take the second—*Qui non celat amare non potest.* 'He—or she—who cannot keep secret cannot love.' Why, here is, in itself, sufficient ground to acquit my client honourably. We will grant, if you please, that my client has a secret preference for one—not necessarily the one whom she has known longest—of the two aspirants. What better justification for accepting the service of both, than the fact that she has a secret preference for one?"

Here the orator paused while one of his clerks poured him out a glass of water, and while he looked round, expectant of applause.

There was a murmur, which might have meant applause and might have meant astonishment. Tom, at his desk, looked disgusted. It seemed as if the wind was being taken out of his sails altogether.

"The third clause," the counsel continued, is, 'Nemo duplici potest amore ligari'—'No one can be bound by a twofold love.' Well, my Lady and Sisters of this Honourable House, although my learned Brother based his whole argument upon this one clause, the force of which I readily concede to him, as a matter of fact, it has no bearing whatever upon the question. For, if you will consider, the charge is that the lady has accepted presents and service from two aspirants at the same time. That is so. We grant it. Does it follow that she is bound by a twofold love—that she has professed to entertain a preference for both? Ladies of Thelema, as one of the two men, I emphatically deny it."

Here Brother Lancelot arose with flushing cheeks, and asked whether his learned Brother was to be understood as speaking from his own knowledge, and as conveying to the Court the information that he himself, Brother

Peregrine, was regarded by Sister Rosalind with no preference whatever ?

The defendant was here observed to smile.

The counsel for the defence made reply, softly :

"I speak from information given by the defendant herself. I do not dare to go beyond that information. It may be, unhappily for me, that Sister Rosalind has a preference for my learned Brother, or had before this case came on. That may be so, although there is not a tittle of evidence to submit before the Court for or against that supposition. It is only when the lady has accepted a lover in title as well as his simple offerings, that she can be said at all *amore ligari*, to be bound in love. But as yet the Sister Rosalind has bestowed that title on no one; therefore, I maintain, she can in no sense be said to be *duplici amore ligari*, bound by a double love.

"This point established, I pass on to another clause which, as I shall show clearly and distinctly, makes in my favour. It is written in the fourth Article: 'Semper amorem minui vel cresci constat'—'Always must love in-

crease or be diminished.' What more rational course for my fair client to adopt than, before pronouncing finally in his favour or against him, to allow his passion to increase, or if it will not bear the test of patience, to see it diminish, and meanwhile to gratify him, or both of them or any number of them, not one Brother only, but saving the duty and devotion owed to you, most honourable Ladies of the Court and Sisters of Thelema, not one Brother only, I say, but all the Brothers together?

"Let me pass over a few clauses which, without any ingenuity, could be shown to be so many fair and just arguments for my client, whose cause, however, is so simple that she wants no clause of the Code except those which at once commend themselves to all. I refer you, therefore, at once to the twelfth Law: 'Amor semper consuevit ab avaritiæ domiciliis exulari'—'Love is banished from the abodes of avarice.'"

Here Brother Lancelot sprang to his feet.

"I protest," he cried hotly, "I protest against this attempt to introduce an unworthy motive. Nothing, I am convinced——"

The Lady President leaned forward, and interrupted him.

"Nothing of the kind, Brother Lancelot," she said, "could be imputed to you, and no one could believe that you had or could impute unworthy motives to the defendant. The Court, indeed, is astonished that the counsel for the defence could think it necessary even to allude to this clause in connection with the case."

"If my learned Brother," said Brother Peregrine gently, "had heard me to the end, he would have been spared the necessity for his protest. Nothing was farther from my intentions than to connect the vulgar vice of avarice with him or with my client. It was in another sense: the avarice which would grudge the smallest favours bestowed on others, the avarice which is akin to jealousy, the avarice which belongs to a too sensitive organisation, and which would make of love an absolute servitude, the avarice which is a sentiment contrary to the spirit of this illustrious House of Thelema; it is concerning that avarice that I would have spoken, but I refrain. Better omit some things which might

be said than incur the chance of misconception or misrepresentation."

The advocate shook his head and sighed sadly, as if the stupidity of the other counsel was the subject of grave pity. Then he went on again. All this time the defendant, sitting wrapped in her long robe of grey, wore her hood drawn entirely over her head, so that no part of her face could be seen.

"Let us proceed, and now I shall be brief. It is written again in the thirteenth Article: 'Amor raro consuevit durare vulgatus'—'Love seldom lingers when 'tis told.' Ladies, what more cogent reason for my client to disguise her preference, to procrastinate, to keep all aspirants in doubt while secretly inclining to one? In this case there are two, both Brothers of this noble House of Thelema, both ready to devote themselves assiduously to this one damoiselle. Why should she wish her choice to be divulgated, if indeed she has already chosen?

"I will, however, leave this point, and call your attention to the twenty-fourth clause of the Code, which in a very remarkable manner bears upon the case before the

Court. 'Verus amans nihil beatum credit nisi quod cogitet amanti placere'—'The true lover believes nothing but what he believes will please the lady.' The true lover! Mark those words. Has it, I ask, pleased my deeply-injured client to be the subject of this important trial, to have it even insinuated that she has infringed the Code of Love? The true lover!"

Here Brother Lancelot sprang to his feet, and was about to protest, when the Court ordered him to have patience.

"I will now only call your attention to two more clauses," continued the counsel for the defence. "In the twenty-sixth Article we read: 'Amor nihil posset leviter amore denegari'—'Love cannot lightly be denied of love.' My Lady Abbess and Sisters of this Honourable House, what are we to think of a Brother who is so lightly turned away from Love——"

"I AM NOT!" shouted Tom, springing to his feet in a real rage.

This time there was irresistible applause; and even Sister Rosalind half raised her veil as if to give her opponent one look of gratitude.

"Si—lence in the Court!" cried the usher.

Miranda did not reprove this manifestation, and Brother Peregrine, whose myriad crows'-feet seemed to twinkle all over, and whose eyes lightened up at the interruption as if in hope of a good battle of words, threw his gown behind him and stood defiant.

But Tom sat down, and the applause ceased, and the Court awaited the continuation of the speech.

"What shall we say," he asked, "of one who, because his mistress accepts the service of others, thinks there is nothing left for him but to go away and weep? Lastly, ladies, I adduce, without a word of comment—because my learned Brother has already dwelt too long upon this clause, from his own erroneous point of view—I adduce, and beg you most carefully to remember, the thirty-first Article, in which it is asserted that 'Unam fœminam nihil prohibet à duobus amari'—'Nothing prevents a damoiselle from being loved by two men.' What, indeed!—or by fifty? And what is this case before us but an exact and literal illustration of the com-

mandment? In acting, as she has wisely chosen to act, my client, I maintain, has proved herself as learned in the constitutions of Love as she is, by her nature and her loveliness, one of Love's fairest priestesses.

"My Lady Abbess and Sisters of this Honourable House, I have said what seemed to my poor understanding the best to be said. If I have failed, which I cannot believe, in conveying to you, not only the legal aspect of the case, which is clear, but also what may be called the moral aspect—I have failed if I have not convinced you of the innocence of my client, even in thought. My learned Brother has invited you to find against her, and to mitigate the penalty. I, for my part, invite you to find for her, and to allow her all the honours of a triumphant success. To his eulogium I have nothing to add. You, who value the freedom of your sex—you, who estimate rightly the value of the Code by which your conduct is guided, will accord to my client a fair, an honourable, and a complete acquittal."

Brother Peregrine sat down amid dead silence. There was no applause at all. His speech was brilliant, eloquent, and brilliantly delivered. But it lacked, what characterised Tom's less ambitious effort, reality of feeling. It was theatrical, therefore the effect was cold.

Miranda asked if the counsel for the prosecution had anything to say in reply.

Brother Lancelot said that a great deal might be spoken in answer to his learned Brother, but that he should not inflict a second speech needlessly upon the Court. He contended only that his original arguments remained untouched; that the adroit attempt of the counsel for the defence to turn a legal argument into a personal attack had clearly failed; that the clauses which he ingeniously twisted and turned to suit his case had nothing really to do with it; that in the interests of order, and in the maintenance of that true freedom which was the pride and glory of Thelema, he prayed a conviction, but asked for mitigation of penalty.

Then he sat down, and the Court proceeded to deliberate.

The case, which had been begun almost as a burlesque, or at least as an unreal revival of an ancient custom, was now, owing to the pleadings on either side, assuming a very real interest to the spectators. It was clear that the feelings of one of the speakers were very real indeed. Of that there could be no doubt; and as everybody knew perfectly well that poor Tom was only unsuccessful on account of his poverty, and as it was suspected that the fair defendant was as ready to make her open choice of Tom as he was to offer his suit and service, and as there appeared in the speech of Brother Peregrine a ring of flippancy as if he was only showing his cleverness, the sympathies of the audience were entirely with the prosecution. Meantime, the Sisters crowded round the Throne, conferred with the President in whispers, and then there was an awful pause.

The colloquy lasted a quarter of an hour, during which everybody on the terrace talked in whispers.

And then there was a general rustle of dresses and movement among the chairs,

because the conference of the Sisters was over, and they were returning to their chairs. But the pages who had been lying at their feet were standing now behind them, and the javelin-men were gathered behind the Throne, and the trumpeters were on either side of the President, and the clerks were collecting all the papers.

Miranda rose and all the Court with her. Sister Rosalind advanced a step and stood before the counsel's desk. At the first words of the President she threw back her hood and stood as before, pale, beautiful, and resigned.

"Sister Rosalind," said the Judge, in the clear full tones of her fine contralto. "Sister Rosalind, the Court has considered the case, with the assistance of the Ladies of Thelema; we are unanimously of opinion that the continuous acceptance of flowers, gloves, or ribbons from more than one aspirant is a thing contrary to the Code of Love. We, therefore, find that you have been guilty of an infringement of the law. At the same time, the Court is equally unanimous in finding that you have been led into this infringement

by no unworthy motive, and that your fair reputation remains unsullied. The penalty inflicted by the Court is that you receive an admonition, in such terms as his courtesy will allow, from the prosecutor in the case, Brother Lancelot himself. And it is the pleasure of this Court that the admonition be privately administered in this garden. Before the Court rises, I have to invite our friends" (Miranda looked round the terrace, full of spectators) "to the Refectory of the Abbey. Hospitality has ever been the duty of monastic orders, and here there is no *jour maigre*."

She stepped down from her Throne. The trumpets blew: the band struck up a march: the pages lifted her train: Brother Bayard gave her his hand, and similarly escorted, the Sisters followed. After them marched Desdemona herself, her brow knitted with legal problems. Then came clerks, javelin-men, and the usher of the Court.

The spectators left the terrace and crowded after the procession, which made straight for the great hall.

Nobody was left but Brother Lancelot and

Sister Rosalind, who was waiting for her admonition. The garden was quite empty: not a servant, not a page, was there to see.

"Oh! Tom," she cried, throwing off the cloak and clapping her hands. "It was lovely; it was something to live for. What can I do for you for your beautiful speech? It was ten times as good as Mr. Exton's—and because you meant it all," she added softly.

"Nelly," said the admonitor, taking her hands; "you know what I want you to give me."

She shook her head. "It cannot be. . . . Poor old Tom. . . . Poor Nelly."

"Then you do love me—Nell—just a little?"

It wanted but this last touch.

"Ask me no more, for at a breath I yield."

He had her two hands in his and, as he spoke, he drew her gently, so that, without suspecting, her cheek met his cheek and her lips met his lips.

"Tom! Tom!" she cried.

"Do you love me, then; do you love me, Nell?" he persisted.

"Tom—you know I do."

"And not that other fellow at all?"

"No, Tom; not at all. Only you."

This was a pretty kind of admonition to bestow upon a penitent which followed this declaration.

All that need be said, so far as details go, is that the admonition lasted but a moment—fleeting indeed are all the joys of life—and then she forced her hands from his grasp, and drew back with a cry and a start.

"Oh! Tom. And it can never be. Because I have got to marry the other man. No; it is no use. Mamma says so. She writes to me to-day; she says that nothing else would persuade her to let me remain in this place, where one of the Brothers, a gentleman by birth, wears a smock-frock, and has set the irreligious and unchristian example of marrying a dairymaid. 'No one,' she says, 'can tell whose principles may not be subverted by this awful act of wickedness.' And I am only to wait until Mr. Exton proposes, and then to go home at once."

"Oh! And you think, Nell, that he looks like—like proposing?"

"I am sure of it, Tom, I am sorry to say."

"And you think you will marry him?"

"Yes, I must."

"Oh!" He dug his heel in the turf, and said savagely "You must. We shall see."

When Tom led Nelly to her place in the Refectory, five minutes later, she had thrown off the grey mantle and hood, as he had discarded the black gown and square cap; and she was dressed, like the other Sisters, in complete twelfth century costume—armour, Brother Peregrine called it. She looked bright and pleased; but some of the guests, including Lord Alwyne, thought there was the trace of a tear upon her cheek. However, the music was playing, and the feast was going on merrily, and the champagne was flowing, and there were so many delightful girls round him, that Lord Alwyne had no time to look more closely.

"This is delightful," he said to Desdemona, next to whom he was sitting. "This brings back one's youth: this reminds one of the past. It is like a dream to see so many lovely girls all together in the same place.

There is no place like this Abbey of yours :

> "'Old as I am, for ladies' love unfit,
> The power of beauty I remember yet.'

I am like La Fontaine. I bask in their smiles when I can no longer win their hearts. Where are my glasses ? Ah ! glasses—*bon jour lunettes*, *adieu*, *fillettes*, as the Frenchman said. A man's day is done when he wants glasses to see fair eyes."

"And your son ?"

"Graveairs is teaching political economy to his dairymaid. I think, Desdemona, that I should have liked myself to administer that admonition to Nelly all alone in the garden. But, no doubt, Tom did it with more solemnity. And the rogue looks as if it had not been an unpleasant task. I shall ask Nelly, presently, to tell me in what terms he bestowed the admonition. What *would* her mother have said ?"

CHAPTER X.

"'Away,' she cried, 'grave heart and solemn sighs!
Kiss and be merry: preach the sermon after.
Give me the careless dance and twinkling eyes:
Let me be wooed with kisses, songs, and laughter.'"

ALMA'S delirium of triumph reached its climax on the Sunday morning when, in self-conscious grandeur, she ambled up the aisle behind her mother. Alan was not in the church, being, as his *fiancée* presently reflected with a jealous pang, most likely with Miss Dalmeny. This circumstance, however, was perhaps fortunate, because even Alan's loyalty might hardly have stood the test of that triumphal march up the aisle, that tossing of the head which made his betrothed an object of envy to a few and of sniggering contempt to many. Those who most envied, longed, and bitterly

reproached the partiality of fate, were especially the two young ladies who just missed the golden apple. What had they done that Alma alone should be singled out for this special good fortune? As for those Sisters of the Order who were attending the service, feelings of quite peculiar wonder and pity for their unfortunate Brother passed across their minds and hindered their devotions. Harry was not at church either, a fact which Alma speedily ascertained by looking for him in his usual place. She was sorry for that, too. She felt that she could have enjoyed furtively contemplating his black looks. The girl was dressed in a simple stuff, which Alan asked her mother, whose taste he could trust, to buy for her. She resented the simplicity of the costume, which she would have preferred, I think, made up in red velvet, the splendour of which would have increased the envy of other maidens, and she resented certain enforced restrictions as to ribbons, of which she would have liked an assortment in various colours. But she had the sense to give way, on the hint from her mother that Mr. Dunlop would prefer a quiet dress.

"You've got," said her mother severely, "to try and be a lady—to look at, I mean—if you can. I've never interfered with your bits of finery, though many's the time it's gone to my heart to see a gell of mine go about for all the world like a gipsy wench round a may-pole. But I know what Mr. Dunlop is used to, and you've got to take my advice now. Lord! Lord! What an unnatural thing it is, to be sure!"

"As if I was the only girl in the world that a gentleman has fallen in love with."

"Fallen in love!" echoed her mother. "Fallen in love, indeed! And with you! Why, what's your good looks compared to Miss Miranda or Miss Nelly or any of the young ladies at the Court? And what's your silly saucy ways compared with their beautiful talk? And what sort of manners have you got, I should like to know, compared with theirs? Fallen in love! It's all a part of the poor young gentleman's craziness."

She went about her work, this unnatural mother, with lips that moved in silent talk, because she was greatly disturbed in her

mind. It seemed to her honest soul like treachery towards the memory of her dead mistress. And, as she told Alma, she knew ladies and she knew the ways that gentlemen are used to.

"Your manners!" she went on, piling it up—this sort of truth-hearing is really very painful. "Whatever in the world Mr. Dunlop will say when he sees you sit at your dinner, I don't know. You take your victuals—well, you take 'em like your father. And I can't say worse for you."

"You had better tell father so," returned Alma. "But, mother, now," she put on her coaxing way, "if you'll tell me, little by little, you know, because I can't learn it all at once, what I'll have to alter, I'll try. I really will. And you should like to see me a real lady, shouldn't you?"

But Mrs. Bostock shook her head.

"I shall never see that," she said. "Ladies are born and bred, not made to order. Lord bless you, child, you'll never make more than a tin-kettle lady."

This was not the opinion of her father, who accepted the position as one due to the

singular merit of his daughter and the fact of his own training. The Bailiff, in fact, spent his time, now, chiefly in self-laudation. He assumed the importance which seemed to befit the post of the Squire's father-in-law. He went to market and talked loudly of his son-in-law: he more than hinted at important changes about to be made in the management of the estates: and he patronised those large tenants to whom he had before been servile.

Needless to say that the voice of popular opinion, as expressed by the tenants, was that the Squire, of whose sanity there had long been grievous doubt, was now gone stark-staring mad. Some among them wanted to get up a deputation to Lord Alwyne asking for advice and assistance; but this fell through.

Alma's hours of triumph were fewer than those which her father enjoyed. To sit in church and feel that the eyes of Weyland maidenhood were on you, with looks of envy and longing, was grand. But during the long week, the six days of labour, there was no such soul-ennobling solace to be got. All day long, the future mistress of Weyland

Court went on with her accustomed labour: milked the cows and fed the fowls; made the butter and peeled the potatoes.

"I thought," she said to her mother, "that you wanted me to be a lady. Ladies don't scour milk-pans."

"If ladies don't scour milk-pans," replied the woman of experience, "they do something else. If you didn't do the housework, you'd sit with your hands in your lap, or you'd go out and get into mischief. That's not the way to be a lady. Talk o' you gells! You think that a lady's got nothing to do but lazy away her idle time. I haven't patience with you. And you to marry a gentleman!"

Before this unlucky engagement Mrs. Bostock had got on fairly well with her daughter. There were skirmishes, dexterous exchanges of rapier-thrusts between tongues as sharp as steel, in which one gave and the other took, or the reverse, with equal readiness. And neither bore malice. Also, both stood side by side against the common enemy. Stephen Bostock, as parent and husband, was alternately morose and ferocious. In the former mood he had to be met

with silence or short answers ; in the latter, he had to be stood up to. When he was meditating schemes of plunder he was morose : when his schemes failed, which generally happened, because success in roguery requires as much acuteness as success in honest undertakings, he became ferocious. And on those occasions it would have been delightful for the bystander, were there any, to witness how, by full facers from his wife and half-aside "cheek" from his daughter, the unhappy man would be goaded into rages which left nothing to be desired except a victim. "Very handy," as Harry Cardew observed—"Very handy he was, 'cept when there was a man about." But of late years he had abstained, probably from fear of the consequences, from actually carrying his threats into execution and beating his offspring into a mash.

Things had gone badly with the Bostocks until the head of the house was appointed Bailiff. Then, things went better. As it was easy to cheat the Squire, and operations of quite an extensive character began with the very commencement, gloomy moroseness be-

came the silence of thoughtful reflection, and habitual ferocity was softened into the occasional damn. But, in this sudden and unexpected access of good fortune, the chances of Harry Cardew sank lower and lower. The honest gamekeeper found himself more and more unwelcome at the farmhouse, until one day, a few months before Alma's engagement, he was informed in no measured terms by the Bailiff, that a young man of like calling and social position with himself could by no means be accepted as a candidate for his daughter's hand. The Bailiff put his point in coarse but vigorous English. It made a short sentence, and it left no possible room for doubt or mistake. He weakened it by a threat of personal violence which, addressed to the young giant before him from one so puffy and out of condition as himself, was ludicrous; but the rule, as lawyers say, was absolute. Harry must cease his visits.

And presently came this rosy, this sapphire-and-amaranth-tinted position of things; when the Bailiff's daughter, not of Islington, but of Weyland, was actually engaged to be married to the Squire and the son

of the Squire. Then it was that Stephen Bostock assumed the airs of superiority which so riled and offended the farmers. Then it was that he became all at once the loving, even the doating, father. Then it was that he walked the fields in the evening revolving great dreams of agricultural rule. Then it was that he looked through the veil which generally hides the misty ways of futurity, and saw himself, Stephen Bostock, living in great splendour, held in much honour of all men, drinking quantities of brandy and water among a circle of worshippers and smoking a pipe among other pipes, all of which were myrrh and frankincense offered to himself, the wise, the crafty, the successful Bostock. Then it was that he began to fondle, to caress, and to cuddle his only child, until his endearments became painful, even insufferable, to the young lady; and she would run away and hide herself to get out of his way. And then it was that he discovered that his wife, whom he had hitherto reverenced as a person intimately acquainted, through her experience as lady's-maid, with the habits, customs, and predilections of the aristocracy, was really nothing

better than a shallow pretender to this kind of knowledge, because she objected, from the very beginning, to her daughter's engagement with the Squire.

"You may swear, Stephen," she would say, what time Alma was in bed and her husband was contemplating things through the rosy light which comes of the third or fourth tumbler of grog—"You may swear, Stephen, as much as you like. And what a man would do without swearing, smoking, and drinking, the Lord only knows. Swearing can't make things different; and it's unnatural. It's unnatural, I say."

When Stephen first found his appropriate adjective for the situation, he slapped his leg in rejoicing. When Mrs. Bostock found hers, she cut the thread with which she was working—being a woman who was perpetually sewing—with a sharper snap than usual.

Stephen swore again, but with a murmurous tone of satisfaction, because the light upon the future was growing more roseate, more beautiful.

"A son-in-law," he said, "as is the Squire of this great estate; a son-in-law worth—ah!

—his twenty thousand a year; a son-in-law as is between you and me, wife, a little loose in the upper story; that kind o' son-in-law doesn't grow on every bush, and is to be encouraged when he does come. Encouraged he shall be. Fooled he shall be, if I can fool him. And hen-pecked he will be, for sure and certain, when our Alma once gets her tongue free, and her tail well up, and her claws out. And as regards wild cats, I will say that, for a wild cat, once you wake her up, there's no gell in all Weyland like my gell."

"Yes," said her mother, "she's the Bostock temper. As for my family, we're that meek——"

"You are," replied the husband, finishing his tumbler: "you're as meek as the Irish pig——" He did not explain this allusion, which remains obscure.

It will be seen that these influences were not the highest or the most promising which could be brought to bear on the mind of a young woman about to marry a young man oppressed with great possessions. But Alma had been brought up under them, and knew

no other. It will also be seen that the outlook to Alan, in search of a helpmeet, would have seemed to him, had he known as much as we know, sufficiently dark.

All day long spent in household and dairy labour: and then, alas! all the evening to be got through with her unintelligible lover. Poor Alma! Poor bride-elect! They talked and walked, these fine July evenings, chiefly in the garden of the farm, that long strip of ground planted with raspberry-canes and gooseberry-bushes, and walled on either hand by an apple-orchard. In the dusk and sweet summer twilight they walked up and down the narrow walk, arm in arm, while Alan discoursed and Alma tried to listen, failed to understand, and let her thoughts run off on Harry. More than once she saw the unlucky gamekeeper at the garden-gate, looking wistfully into the garden like the Peri into Paradise, and her heart leaped up, and it wanted but a word, a beckoning, a gesture from her humble lover to make her dare all, throw down the ring of King Cophetua, and rush to the place where she would fain be, the arms of the man who knew her for what

she was, and did not believe her to be a saint.

For really, poor Mr. Dunlop was too unbearable.

Does any girl, *could* any girl, like being improved after her engagement or her marriage? I once knew a man who was very, very intellectual. He was quite familiar with everything that is lofty, abstruse, and unintelligible; he read his *Fortnightly* with more regularity than he read his Bible; he lived, so to speak, and found his nourishment entirely in the Higher Criticism; Mill, Bain, and Herbert Spencer were far, far behind him; and yet he used to clasp his two hands across his massive brow, and say that what we want—meaning mankind at large, including himself—is More Brain Power. This man married a wife, and resolved, as he told all his friends, upon moulding her. Many men have resolved upon moulding their wives, and have not discovered until too late that their wives have moulded *them*. My friend began very much as Alan Dunlop began, only *mutatis mutandis*. He did not lecture her, or teach her. He got her a ticket for the British

Museum Library, took her there, and looked out useful books for her to read—Mill, Bain, and Spencer, the elementary prophets. No one, of course, will be surprised to hear the end of this mournful reminiscence. The young wife made the acquaintance of a young man who sat next to her, and was engaged at a low wage in the Translation Department of the eminent publishers, Messrs. Roguepogue, Gulchit, and Co. I believe he was weak in French, and used to ask his fair neighbour for help in difficult passages. One day they went out at luncheon-time together. Neither of them returned their books, and neither of them ever came back again. And there was great unpleasantness afterwards.

Similarly, there is the well-known case of the æsthetic man—one is almost ashamed to quote it—who wanted to train his wife in true principles of Art, and used to carry her about to Picture Galleries and make her sit for hours in front of Martyrs and Saints going to be tortured, till she grew at last to take a savage and unchristian pleasure in thinking that those heads with the golden halos held on one side and those figures

stuck out ecclesiastically stiff, would shortly be roasting at the stake. She revenged herself by dressing one night when they were dining with quite awfully æsthetic people in a costume of red, green, and yellow. Her husband caught sight of it in the middle of dinner. They carried him away, and his wife went with him. Just as he rallied and came round, he saw it again. In his weak condition it was too much. She is a widow now, with no taste at all for Art.

Alan Dunlop, rapidly discovering that his future wife was not as yet quite the young person he had dreamed of, resolved, like our friends, the Intellectual and the Artistic Prigs, to "mould" his wife.

He moulded her in two ways.

First, he lent her books to read.

The books he chose were those to which he owed, he thought, the ideas which most governed his own life. Among these were Ruskin's *Two Paths*, the *Sesame and Lilies*, and a selection from the *Fors Clavigera*. He forgot that what a man takes away from a book is precisely what he brings to it, only that much developed, that his mind is like the soil

already planted, digged about for air and light, and weeded of false notions. Alma, poor girl, brought nothing to the study of the *Fors* but a blank mind. She understood no single word. First, she did try to read the books: read on, page after page, although the words had no meaning, and, when she put the volumes down, left nothing behind them but a sort of blurr, haze, and bad dream of meaningless sentences which seemed to follow her, to whisper their gibberish in her ear, and to haunt her dreams at night like devils and ghosts. That plan would clearly never do. Then she hit upon another. She would learn a bit and try to repeat it, to show that she really had read the whole. This succeeded tolerably the first evening, but on the second she broke down suddenly and horribly, collapsed, went off into nonsense, and finally foundered altogether.

The second method adopted by Alan was to lecture his *fiancée*. He spent hours every day in expounding the elementary principles of his philosophy, and he hoped that she would readily grasp the science in which women are supposed to have done so much

—social and political economy. He hoped that she would become a second Harriet Martineau. As a matter of fact, I believe that the success of women in Political Economy is due to their acceptance of unproved theories as if they were truths demonstrated beyond all doubt. By this method they have built up a structure which spiteful people say will go to pieces in the first gale of wind. However, Alma listened, and understood nothing. The lecturer went on, but his words poured into her ears while her thoughts were far away.

And then there followed a very curious state of things.

While Alan talked, Alma allowed her thoughts to wander away. She listened mechanically, prepared to smile and murmur when his voice ceased for a moment. Now, after the first preamble with which Alan opened up the subject of his engagement and exposed his reasons, he took it for granted that Alma understood exactly why he wanted to marry her and how they were to live. Alma, who had forgotten all about the preamble, which she never understood, looked

on her marriage as elevation to the rank of a lady, dreamed continually of Weyland Court, and let Alan go on talking of their future in his obscure manner without interruption. That she was to go on living in the village would have seemed too absurd. Far better brave all and marry Harry Cardew.

But what a lover! And what an engagement! And never a kiss, never a hand-squeeze, never the least sigh; only a grave "How do you do, Alma?" or "Good-night, Alma," with a cold shake of the hand and a look of those deep, grave, blue eyes which always when they met her own made the country girl tremble and shake to think of long days and nights to be spent always beneath their solemn, almost reproachful gaze.

What a lover! What an engagement! And, oh! bliss—to run out for five minutes only, when Mr. Dunlop was gone, to meet Harry in the orchard, and he with his arm round her waist like a man, and ready with his honest old lips upon her cheek. And, ah! Heaven! if her father, or her mother, or Mr. Dunlop himself should ever know!

After the political economy Alan proceeded

to the difficulties which more immediately occupied him, connected with the reform of the lower classes. He gave her a lecture on temperance, which was not needed because her father, no doubt from the highest of motives, had frequently enacted the Helot before her; and like all women of her class, she regarded drink with the loathing that comes of experience. Then he spoke of woman's influence over other women. Alma regarded this as a question of authority. Had she been placed over half a hundred maids she would have ruled them all, or known the reason why; and she failed to comprehend what Alan meant when he talked beautifully about the common bond of womanhood, and the sweetness of woman's sympathy with other women. Alma thought of Black Bess and regretted that she was not strong enough to shake her, because she knew that young person to be harbouring thoughts of malice and revenge against herself. Alan went on to talk of the sympathies of class with class, of the natural tendency of human nature to form itself into strata, of the difficulties of passing from one to the other. Alma

thought that she herself would pass with the greatest ease from the lower to the higher—and of the helpful nature of alliances formed between members of one and another. "He is really quite mad," thought the girl. And he tried to draw a picture of a pair living together, devoted like any Comtist to the enthusiasm of Humanity: working out problems in civilisation, leading upwards to the Higher Culture whole droves of smock-frocks, navvies, roughs, whose principal delights theretofore had been beer-drinking, pipe-smoking, leaning against posts, and kicking their wives.

"Harry," cried Alma one evening after nearly a week of this. "He most drives me mad, he does. Either he talks like a schoolmaster, or else he talks like a passon in a pulpit. He's not like a man. Preach? Every day and all day. And goodness gracious only knows what he says. What does he take me for?"

"Heart up, pretty," said Harry. "Heart up. He shan't have you. Never you fear."

"Ah!" she sighed sentimentally. "I should like to be mistress of Weyland Court. That would be grand, if he wasn't there too.

And yet, to have him always looking at me with those solemn eyes of his as if—well—as if he was going to begin another sermon ; it's hardly worth it, Harry. And after all, everybody must like a man better than a preaching doll. And true love—oh! Harry—what a thing that is to read about in the story-books!"

"Ay—Alma—it is. True Love will wash, as the song says."

"And then—" she burst into a low laugh —"only think, Harry, what a rage father would be in. He'd go round—how he would go round! And he couldn't beat me to a mash, as he used to say he would, because—"

"Because," said Harry huskily, "I'd beat any man to a hundred mashes as offered to raise his hand again my little girl."

CHAPTER XI.

"We may live so happy there
That the spirits of the air,
Envying us, may even entice
To our healing paradise
The polluting multitude."

MIRANDA allowed a fortnight to pass after Alan's engagement before she drove over to make a closer acquaintance with the young lady, her future sister-in-law, as she began to say to herself. Mrs. Bostock was a friend of many years' standing, but with her daughter Miranda had but little intercourse, and with the great Stephen Bostock, her husband, none at all. It was therefore lucky that when she drove over to the farm, the Bailiff whose approaching connection with the Great caused him to assume overwhelming airs, graces, and ease of familiarity, was out on the farm, bully-

ing the labourers. Alma, too, was down in the village on some quest of her own, and Mrs. Bostock alone was in the place to receive her visitor.

She was ashamed and confused, this ex-lady's maid. It seemed a dreadful thing to her that Miss Miranda, of all people in the world, should come to her house under the circumstances. For, like anybody else, she regarded her daughter as one about to step into the place long reserved for Miss Dalmeny.

"Oh! dear, Miss Miranda," she cried. "Is it you? Come in, do. And I more than half ashamed to look you in the face. Let him walk the pony into the shade. And where will you sit? In the porch? Well, it is fresh and airy here, with the flowers and all. And how well you are looking, and what a lovely frock you've got on! But you always were as beautiful as flowers in May."

"Perhaps the fine feathers make a fine bird, Mrs. Bostock."

But Mrs. Bostock shook her head.

"No," she said. "That's what they say, but it's nonsense. 'Tis but a jay in peacock's

plumes, all done and ended. That's what I say to Alma: 'Trick yourself out,' I say, 'just as you like.' It's what I say to Bostock, and it makes him mad. 'Put what you like on the gell,' I say, 'and she's Alma Bostock still.' Lady? Not a bit of a lady. You might—" her eyes wandered from the flower to the vegetable garden. "You might as well plant a onion in the flower-bed and think you'll get a tulip."

"I came to see you on purpose about Alma."

Mrs. Bostock, a little relieved by the declaration of sentiments which, she felt, did her credit in Miranda's eyes, sat down in the porch opposite her visitor with folded hands. It was a pretty little rustic porch, with roses and honeysuckle climbing about the sides, like a cottage-porch on the stage.

"Yes," Miranda repeated; "I came to see you about Alma, now that she is going to be a kind of sister-in-law."

"No, Miss Miranda, I won't have that said. There's shame and foolishness already in letting her marry Master Alan to gratify a whim. Don't let her never say that she's

your sister-in-law. Sister, indeed. I'd sister her. And nothing but misery before him."

This way of looking at things disconcerted Miranda, who had expected a sort of apologetic triumph.

"Why misery?" she asked.

"For every reason, Miss Miranda," said Mrs. Bostock. "First, Mr. Dunlop don't care for the gell, not as a gell should be cared for; and second, the gell don't care for him. And if that wasn't enough, I ask you what pleasure in life can he have with a gell who isn't a lady? And nothing will make her a lady neither."

Mrs. Bostock spoke from her experience of gentlefolk, and what she said was true enough, as Miranda very well knew.

"But the case is unusual," she pleaded. "Alan wants to marry a girl who will help him in his plans of life. Surely, Mrs. Bostock, you must own that he is the most disinterested and the noblest of men."

"Stuff an' nonsense!" replied the Bailiff's wife. "Let poor people alone to worry through in their own way. And as for Alma helping him, if ever she is his wife, which I

can't believe will ever be, so unnatural it is, she won't stir her little finger for anybody but herself. And as for joining in this, that and the other, all she thinks about now, day and night, is to be mistress of Weyland Court. And if it wasn't for that I don't believe even her father would make her marry him."

"Oh! but, Mrs. Bostock. Your own daughter!"

"If a mother don't know her own child, no one knows her. Alma's growed up at my apron-strings, and I know her ways. There's only one thing for her, and that's a strong man whom she will be afraid of. She's afraid of Mr. Dunlop, in a way; but not the way I mean; and when she's got over her shyness with him, she'll begin her tricks. Why, already, she's deceived him at every turn."

"How?"

"He gives her books to read. She pretends to read them. She learns little bits and says them by heart, so as to make him think that she has read them all. Deep? There's no telling how deep the gell is. After all, we were all gells once, and many's the time I've told a fib to my lady when I ran

out for a minute, to meet my Stephen in the stable-yard. But then I was not going to stick myself up for a lady."

There was a certain amount of personal jealousy in Mrs. Bostock's feelings. She had hitherto prided herself in her lady's-maid's position and the knowledge it gave her of gentlefolks' ways. Now, this superiority, as soon as her daughter was promoted to the actual position of a lady, would be reft from her. Also, she had a genuine feeling that the honour of the Dunlop family was impugned by this *mésalliance.* Needless to repeat that her husband sympathised with neither of these feelings, but on the contrary, used violent language on what he was pleased to consider the unnatural attitude of a mother.

It was not pleasant for Miranda to hear that the girl on whom Alan built such hopes was beginning with little deceptions.

"But, Mrs. Bostock," she said, trying to make an excuse, "Alma is very young, and we must make allowances. She does not understand that it would be better to tell him clearly that the books are at present too hard for her. She will find out, presently,

that it is best to have no concealment from him."

Mrs. Bostock sniffed, and tossed her head.

"You young ladies," she said, "little know. What with shifts and straits, and bad temper, and violent ways, most gells go on for ever with some deception or another. Sometimes I wonder if I was ever so sly. And they think that no one sees through them."

"It is because they do not know," said Miranda, "how much better it always is to be perfectly and entirely open with everybody."

"It's their nature to," said Mrs. Bostock.

"But you must let me do what I can," Miranda continued. "If Alma will let me be her friend, one may do a great deal more by talking, and—and by example than by finding fault. I went to help her for the sake of Alan, you know, entirely."

"Yes, Miss Miranda, I do know. And after being with him for so many years like—like——"

"Like brother and sister."

"Like brother and sister together, it must

be nothing short of dreadful to see him take up with our Alma."

"Not quite dreadful," said Miranda kindly. "Of course we should all have preferred to see him marry in his own rank."

"And Lord Alwyne, too! Poor dear gentleman!" sighed Mrs. Bostock with real sympathy. "But there—here's Alma coming home with the fal-lals she went out to buy."

Alma pushed open the garden-gate and tripped up the walk with her light elastic step.

"She *is* a pretty girl," Miranda said, watching her from the porch.

Pretty she certainly was. And this afternoon she looked animated, happy, and bright, with a flush in her cheek and a light in her eye. She had, indeed, succeeded in squeezing a sovereign out of her mother—part of certain money entrusted to Mrs. Bostock by Alan for her behalf—and had gone to the village shop to get the fal-lals imported especially for her from Athelston. On the way she had met Black Bess and interchanged a few compliments in which she felt herself to have the superiority. Had Alan heard these remarks, he would not have felt happier. She wore

the grey stuff dress with blue ribbons which her mother had made for her; she had a light straw hat upon her head, and her long bright hair lay in curls and waves over her shoulders.

I regret to say that at sight of Miranda, the light went out of Alma's eyes, the smiles from her lips, the brightness from her forehead. She turned quite pale, save for an angry red spot in either cheek. This was the real lady, the lady whom she could ape but never imitate, the lady whom her mother held up to her as the impossible standard, and Mr. Dunlop as the standard to which he would have her attain. She was sick of Miss Dalmeny's name. "Miranda," said Mr. Dunlop, "thinks so and so;" or, "Miranda would, I believe, advise you in such a way;" or, "Miranda would like you to act in this or the other way." Always at school, always engaged upon a hopeless copy, of which Miss Dalmeny was the model.

And only five minutes before Black Bess had taunted her with the accusation that though engaged to marry Mr. Dunlop, everybody knew that Miss Dalmeny was the only woman he truly loved, as she, poor Alma,

would surely find out to her cost, when it was too late. And she added, this kind and friendly maiden, that she sincerely pitied her, and had done, ever since she persuaded Mr. Exton, by promising she only knew what, to give her the golden apple.

Therefore it is quite comprehensible that Alma was not delighted to see Miranda, or desirous of forming a close alliance with her.

"How do you do, Alma?" said Miranda, keeping her hand for a little. "I would not come for a few days after I heard of your engagement, because I wanted you to feel a little settled first. I hope we shall be very good friends."

"Alma should be proud and grateful," said her mother.

Alma said nothing. Miranda saw by the gleam of her eyes that she was neither proud nor grateful, only for some reason of her own, resentful. But Miranda was not to be beaten. What reason had the girl to be resentful?

"I am going into the village to the library, Alma," she said. "Will you turn back and come with me. Unless you are tired. We shall find Alan there, very likely."

"I am not at all tired," said Alma reluctantly, because she neither wanted to see Alan herself, nor did she want Miranda to see him alone. "I will go back with you."

She tossed her paper package on the bench and turned to walk down the garden path, leading the way in a sullen and defiant manner, not pretty at all, nor significant of the Higher Culture.

Mrs. Bostock shook her head.

"Jealousy, that is," she said. "Alma's jealous of you, Miss Miranda. Well—to think that I should live to see my daughter jealous of Miss Dalmeny!"

It was not pride, but in sorrow that she spoke.

Alma volunteered no remark on the way to the library, but she was glad to see in the distance Black Bess herself at an open window, watching her as she walked side by side with Miss Dalmeny. There were, then, compensations. It was something to walk side by side with the only woman—and she a lady—whom Mr. Dunlop truly loved, and to feel that she would not let him. Miranda

tried to set the girl at her ease, but in vain. Alma was sulky and awkward.

"Will you come to Dalmeny Hall, and stay with me, Alma?" she asked.

"Stay with you, Miss Miranda?" Alma opened her eyes wide.

"Yes; we are very quiet at the Hall, if you do not mind that. I must make your acquaintance now, and we must be very good friends for the future."

Alma murmured something in reply, she hardly knew what. She was walking with Miss Dalmeny. Black Bess was watching her with envy and all uncharitableness, which was like blackberry jam to her heart, and Miss Dalmeny was inviting her to stay at the Hall.

To stay at the Hall! To be sure, there would be something truly awful in the way of perpetual good manners to put up with, and how ladies and gentlemen can endure to be always on tiptoe was beyond poor Alma's comprehension. But then the grandeur: to think how her father would go round like a turkeycock in the farmyard, with swelling breast and head erect, proclaiming that his

girl was at Dalmeny Hall! Perhaps she had been wrong to be so full of jealousy and sulkiness. Perhaps Miss Dalmeny meant well after all; very likely she thought that, as she could not have Alan for herself, it would be well to make friends with those who could.

Perhaps, too, she had not grasped the whole possibilities of the situation. As she walked demurely by the side of the young lady she became conscious of the extraordinary difference between her own frock and Miss Dalmeny's costume. And without realising that to wear such a costume required an education, she at once began to build dreams in her own mind of how such a dress, with such a hat and such gloves, should be her own. No doubt at sight of them Black Bess would fairly burst with spite.

In the midst of this pleasing dream they arrived at the Library.

Of course it was not to be expected that anybody would be there on this hot July afternoon, when the boys and girls were sleepily droning to the master in the school, the schoolmaster was sleepily droning to the boys and girls, the cobbler was falling asleep

over his work and his latest work on Atheism, the very labourers in the fields—it was just before the harvest—were sleepily contemplating the golden grain about to fall beneath their sickles, and even the Bailiff was sleepily musing on the greatness of the future. All the world was sleepy, all the world was at rest, and the white walls of the Library—the ex-Dissenting Chapel—looked thirsty, hot, and uninviting. Two *habitués*, however, were within it, the usual two—Alan Dunlop, reading and making notes at the table, which, by constant use, he had made his own; and Prudence Driver, the librarian. She, poor thing, was engaged in a statistical return—Alan Dunlop was as *exigeant* in the matter of statistical returns as the Education Department. She was carefully extracting from her book the solid crumbs of comfort: such as that an inquirer had taken Euclid from the shelves once during the year—she omitted to mention that he brought the philosopher back in five minutes with an apology; she noted down the gratifying fact that Mill's Works had been twice taken from the shelves, once knocked down by accident, and once

asked for by mistake; she found, to her joy, that inquiries had been made (by the Squire, but she did not say so) after Darwin, Carlyle, Tennyson, Froude, Huxley, Freeman, Swinburne, Morris, Mathew Arnold, Herbert Spencer, and Alexander Bain; that Robert Browning's latest poems had been taken down—by the Vicarage girls, though this did not appear; and that works not in the library, such as Volney, Toland, Voltaire's *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, Clarke's *Critical Review*, and such had been asked after more than once. In fact, it was the cobbler, who, whenever he was a little drunk, used to drop in and terrify the girl by demanding these and other atheistical productions. As for the remaining books in request, they were vain and frivolous things, novels, story-books, travel books, anything but such as inform the intellect and advance knowledge. And yet, when Prudence Driver's sheet of returns was complete, it was such as a statistical Member of Parliament would have contemplated with the keenest satisfaction. "Can we," he might have asked, "can we any longer speak of the backward state of our village educa-

tion when in a small place of five hundred inhabitants such a return is possible? What do we see? Euclid, Mill, Bain, Spencer, Carlyle, Huxley, Darwin, Arnold, and Tennyson in eager request; Volney, Toland, and Voltaire asked for—what would honourable members wish for more, even in the Bodleian or the University Library of Cambridge?"

The quiet, pale-faced girl, who alone, with Miranda, believed in the young Reformer, looked up eagerly as the visitors entered the library. Perhaps it might be some new convert to the glories of self-culture, somebody really wanting to read Mill. No. It was Miss Miranda, and with her—Alma. At sight of her Prudence Driver resumed her task, a set gloom suddenly developing on her face. Alma Bostock represented the one false, the fatally false move taken by Mr. Dunlop. Her instinct told her that there would be nothing in common between her Prophet and a girl whose character and conduct were of the most frivolous. And here was Miss Miranda actually walking about with her! Did they not know, then?

"You, Miranda, and Alma! And to-

gether! This is very kind, Miranda," cried Alan, starting from his chair. "What brings you here?"

"I was calling on Alma, and we thought we would come down here and find you out," Miranda replied, speaking for Alma as well as herself. "We wanted to know how you are getting on?"

"I am getting on badly," said Alan. "There is no possible doubt on that point. But we shall do better presently, shall we not, Alma?"

Alma looked up and smiled, but not with her eyes. Prudence Driver noticed, with a pang of wrath, that there was no sympathy in her look. How *could* a man be fooled by such a girl! She dug her pen into the ink, and went on with her statistics. "'Swiss Family Robinson,' six times taken out; 'Robinson Crusoe,' eight times; 'Pilgrim's Progress,' twenty times;" and so on.

"I have quite decided on giving up the field-work," said Alan. "After nearly a year of it, I think I may claim to have tried by actual experience all that a farm labourer has to do."

"And about the eighteen shillings a week, Alan?" asked Miranda, smiling.

"Well"—he smiled too; it was the one of his failures of which he was least ashamed—"there is a great deficit in the accounts. Look, I have actually spent five and twenty shillings a week." He drew a paper from his pocket-book, which he handed to Miranda, who looked at it and passed it on to Alma.

"And yet, you see, the item of beer does not enter into the account at all."

"They have cheated you," said Alma rather grimly. Prudence Driver started. How could Alma know what she had long suspected? She forgot that she was a little stay-at-home, while Alma went about and heard the truth.

"Who has cheated me?" asked Alan.

"Everybody has cheated you. The butcher, the baker, the grocer, the milkman, the boys at the store. They all charge you double what they charge us, and they give you bad weight. Why, we have all known that ever since you came here. What did you expect, Mr. Dunlop?"

"Is it possible? I have always trusted what they say." He spoke in a helpless way. "Do you mean, Alma, that everybody in the village is dishonest?"

"Everybody," she replied calmly. She would have added, "And my father the worst of all;" but she dreaded the paternal wrath. "Everybody," said Alma.

"This, Miranda," observed the Reformer, "only shows one practical and very useful side of our engagement. Alma can begin her career of usefulness by putting a stop to these wretched little rogueries. She will make them feel how utterly degrading are their cheating ways. What can be done with people who steal? The Higher Culture necessitates, as a mere foundation, the possession, not only of simple honesty, but also that of Honour—the Principle which in the Modern school replaces or supplements Religion."

"But, Alan," said Miranda, "it is dreadful to think that you have been cheated all these months and have been starving yourself to keep within an impossible allowance."

He shook his head. "I have not been starving, because I have exceeded my allow-

ance by something like six and twenty pounds, which means ten shillings a week."

"What is the Village Parliament doing all the time, Alan?" asked Miranda.

"We have closed it. Nobody came after the supper was suppressed, and so we were obliged to dissolve *sine die*. Do not ask me about anything, Miranda. All has been one great failure, even the Co-operative Store and the Good Liquor Bar. Would you believe that the people prefer to buy their groceries at the village shop where they are dearer and adulterated, and their beer at the Spotted Lion where it is mixed with sugar and treacle and all sorts of stuff, instead of the pure Allsopp we sell at the Good Liquor Bar?"

"It seems stupid beyond all belief," said Miranda.

"No it isn't," interposed Alma, in her half-sullen way. "It isn't stupid at all."

"What do you mean, Alma?" asked Alan.

"I mean that just as you are cheated by the butcher and the baker, so you are cheated by your shopmen."

"How do you know that, Alma?"

"I know it—because I know it." It was not her business to tell Mr. Dunlop that she had heard the character of the two young men in Athelston, that she knew how they carried on between Saturday and Monday, and that her father made an open scoff, every day, of the shameless way in which those noble twin institutions were conducted.

"But in what way—how can they cheat you?" Alan asked. "They have orders to put every order down in a book. The profits are to be divided among those who purchase in proportion to their purchases."

"Profits!" Alma laughed derisively.

"Please explain, Alma."

"One of them sands the sugar, mixes the tea with sloe-leaves, and waters the tobacco. The other waters the beer, and makes a sort of mess—I don't know how—with the porter. And then they don't put down what is bought. Bless you, do you think our people are going to be so particular as to see their orders entered in a book? So it isn't a bit cheaper, and nothing is a bit better

than at the shop over the way. There, Miss Miranda!"

She hurled her shot as if it was a matter of deep personal concern with Miss Dalmeny that the shop should go well.

"And every Saturday," she continued, "both those precious boys go off to Athelston together."

"To see their relations?" said Alan. "I know."

"No, to get drunk and smoke at a harmonic meeting. Bless you, everybody knows it. They've been seen there, times and times."

This was pleasant intelligence. Prudence Driver, meantime, had left her work, and creeping round in her noiseless way, stood behind Alan's chair.

"No, Alma Bostock," she said, "everybody does not know it. *I* do not. None of my own people know it. If it is true, how do you know it?"

"That doesn't signify," she replied. "Let Mr. Dunlop look into the books and he will see."

The fact was, of course, that Bailiff

Bostock, having to deal officially with the store, very early discovered the wrong-doing, set a trap, caught the offenders, used them for his own purpose, and made no secret of what he had done at home.

"It feels," said Alan, stretching out his hands helplessly, "as if one was surrounded by inextricable meshes. Ignorance and habit is expected, Miranda. But I hadn't, I confess, bargained for dishonesty."

"Then," said Alma, "you bought a pig in a poke."

It is, to be sure, a homely proverb, but perhaps there was no absolute necessity for Alan to shudder, or for Miranda to contemplate steadily the point of her parasol. Worse things might be—have been—said by young ladies of country education. Yet it did seem, even to Prudence Driver, as if there was a certain incongruity in Mr. Dunlop's bride talking of pigs in a poke.

Then Alma, feeling really as if there was no longer any reason to be afraid either of her betrothed, or of Miss Dalmeny, so long as she could communicate these startling items of intelligence, sat boldly on the table,

with her feet dangling, and her hands on either side clasping the table-edge, and, all unconscious that she was, even to Prudence Driver, a very personification of ungracefulness—to be sure Prudence read books and had opinions—went on with those startling revelations, which gave her so great a superiority to Miss Dalmeny, who knew nothing.

"What did you expect?" she said. "Lord! what could you expect? You get a lot of farm labourers—these common farm labourers—and you give them supper and beer, as much supper and beer as they liked, and you told them to discuss and become a Parliament. What did they do? What could you expect them to do? They drank all the beer, and when there was no more, they went away home. You went to work among them in a smock-frock, which is a thing no gentleman ever dreamed of doing before. They only laughed at you. I've stood in a corner of the field a dozen times and watched them laughing at you. Here's your Library. Who comes to it? Nobody. There's your Bath-room and Laundry. Who uses it? Nobody. Catch *them* washing themselves.

They never did such a thing in all their lives. There's your Art Gallery. Does anybody ever go to see the pictures? Ask Prudence Driver."

The curator held down her head. The charge was too true.

"You had a theatre here and a circus. They went to them, so long as you paid. When they had to pay for themselves, they went to the Spotted Lion. And as for your village festivals, they went to get the drink."

All this was hard to bear. And yet Alan felt that it was all literal fact, and he tried to find comfort in the thought that his future wife knew exactly what had happened.

"Is it all true, Prudence?" asked Miranda. "Do you, also, know all these things?"

"All, except about the cheating," the librarian replied. "And how Alma Bostock knows that, if it is true, I can't say."

"And it doesn't signify, if you could say," retorted Alma in her least amiable tone.

"One thing I can do at once," said Alan, rising. "I can go and get the accounts of the store and the bar, and have them investigated. Good-bye, Miranda. Go home,

Alma, and don't tell any one else what you have told me. Does not this, too, Miranda, show that I was justified? You see, at the very beginning, Alma puts her finger on the weak places of my system."

What he meant was, that the fact of Alma being up to all the wickedness which had been flourishing at his expense, showed his own prudence in choosing a wife from her class, and her fitness in thus being able to read the ways of the people. He left the Library and strode off quickly to the store, which, with the bar, were quite at the other end of the village.

Observe how custom makes people careless. It was a very hot afternoon; there seemed not the least chance that any one would want to buy anything, and the young men in charge of the two departments, after their one o'clock meal, fell both fast asleep one on each side of the table in the back office. But the safe, in which the account-books were kept, was wide open. Alan, seeing the boys asleep, and the safe open, hesitated a little. Then, reflecting that the account-books were his own, he seized them

all, four in number, and carried them back with him to the Library.

There was no one there at all, now, except the librarian.

"Prudence," he said, "do you know book-keeping?"

"A little," she replied.

"Then let us shut up the Library for the day and go into the books, as well as we can, together."

It was five o'clock when the two young men awoke, yawned, stretched themselves, and complained of being athirst. One of them proceeded to take such steps as might result in tea; the other strolled lazily into the shop.

The next minute he rushed back with a pallid face and shaking hands.

"Good Lord, 'Arry! the safe's open and the books are gone."

That was the dreadful fact.

They looked at each other in mute horror for a brief space. Tea, sleepiness, and thirst, were all alike forgotten in that supreme moment, when they suddenly realised that they were found out.

"What shall we do, Jeremiah?" asked Harry. He was pot-boy, and the gentleman with the Scriptural name, who was, as we have before explained, a Particular Baptist, was clerk to the store.

"Step it," said Jeremiah curtly. "It don't matter who's got the books. Whoever it is, we're done for. Step it."

"Where?" asked Harry.

"Anywheres," said Jeremiah. "Except Athelston way."

He went to the till and extracted such small sums as were in it. These he put in his own pocket, leaving nothing for his friend.

"Now," he said, "I'm a-going for a few minutes' walk, I am. Good-bye."

He went out of the door, stood a moment in the brilliant sunshine, and then, turning to the left, disappeared.

Harry, remaining alone, was seized with so great a trembling, that he was fain to draw himself a pint and a half of beer and take that straight down. Then he felt in his pockets. Eighteenpence. Then he realised the selfishness of Jeremiah in taking all the

contents of the till. Truly they were not much. And then putting on his hat, he too went out into the sunshine and took a turn across the fields.

It is sufficient here to say of these two young men that neither has yet returned to Weyland; that one of them, Harry, who really was not such a bad sort to begin with, has repented, and now wears the Queen's scarlet with credit. Of Jeremiah, I only learned the other day by accident that he has recently been seen at certain suburban meetings, laying the odds with freedom. I hope he will succeed. As for Prudence, it was not very long before she was enabled to point out that there were two sets of books kept; that the purchases set down in one varied from one-half to one-fifth of those set down in the other; and that, latterly, save in the case of the Squire himself, or Miss Dalmeny, nothing at all was set down in either book. The conclusion was obvious.

Alan went into Athelston and saw the police inspector.

But when the civil power arrived, the birds

were flown, and it only remained to put up the shutters. This, alas ! was the end of the Weyland Co-operation Store, and the Weyland Good Liquor League.

CHAPTER XII.

"You speak of the people
As if you were a god to punish, not
A man of their infirmity."

Mr. Paul Rondelet, Fellow of Lothian, was growing daily more and more ill at ease. It was borne in upon him with an ever-increasing persistency, as the voice of a warning which would not be silenced, that, in a brief three months, unless he took orders in the interval, he would be—it cost him agonies to put the situation into words—actually without an income! He would be absolutely penniless. He would have to work for the daily bread which had, hitherto, always come to him without his even asking for it, unless, as an undergraduate, at perfunctory College Chapel, he, to whom the light bondage of a

College Lectureship was too great a burden, whose haughty soul disdained the fetters of stipulated work, however slight, would positively have to descend into the arena and do his utmost, like quite common mortals, to earn his dinner.

"Earn"—horrid word! As if he were a labourer, or an artisan, or an apprentice, or a tradesman. Earn!

And he the leader, the acknowledged leader of a Party: almost the youngest, quite the most promising, the most hopeful of all the Oxford Parties. The old High Church people had had their innings, and were long ago played out; the Broad Church never had any real charm at logical Oxford; the Low fell out of the running long, long ago; there remained for his day the Ritualists, the Scoffers, the Sneerers, the Know-nothings, the Comtists, and the New Pagans.

The Ritualists began well, but somehow—I think it was that some of the older men belonged to the party, and so the younger men could not pride themselves on the superior intellect of rising genius—they have not succeeded in attracting the more thoughtful

part of young Oxford. Mr. Paul Rondelet speedily found out that it was one sign of superiority to speak of them with a contemptuous pity: not the lofty scorn with which the remnant of the Evangelical party, which have no Art and care little about Culture, are spoken of, but still with a pity which has in it a strong element of contempt. He therefore passed through the stages of scoffer, in which stage none but coarse-minded persons remain; of sneerer—to shine as a sneerer very peculiar and most disagreeable gifts are specially required; of Comtist, with whom some find rest and solace for the soul; of Know-nothing—these are a most attractive set of despairing young men; and of New Pagans.

Everybody knows that Mr. Paul Rondelet was one of the leaders in New Paganism. He called himself, sadly, an Agnostic, but he was in reality a New Pagan. Agnosticism is a cloak which may wrap all kinds of disciples. Go ask the *Nineteenth Century*, or the *Contemporary*, or even the poor old laggard, the *Fortnightly*, to define an Agnostic.

He was an Agnostic by profession, and he spoke sadly of Infinite Silences, as if he was

their original discoverer. But, in reality, he was a New Pagan. It was, indeed, a delightful thing to sit with the select few, the profane vulgar not being admitted, to feel that one possessed the real secret of the Dionysiac myth; to bring to one's bosom the whole truth about Demeter; to know, in a manner only understood by priests and the initiated of old, the divine Aphrodite and the many-breasted Diana; to recognise, almost in secret conclave, that all these, with Isis and Horus, Samson and many others, meant nothing but the worship of the Sun and the Year in its seasons: so that, to those who rightly read the myths, all religion means nothing but the worship of summer and winter, the awaking and the sleep of life, so that there is really no reason at all, according to the New Pagan, why we should not return to the kindly, genial, and beneficent old Gods.

The Modern Prig, if he is of the advanced order, belongs, as a matter of course, to some such school. He gets, that is, as far to the front as he can. He adopts the newest vague Gospel, and holds it, for the time, with the tenacity of a martyr clinging to his creed. And

he poses, having pride in the situation, as I fear many an early martyr did. For the essential and leading characteristic of the Prig is that he believes himself in advance of his age, and very, very far in advance of his father and grandfathers. But nothing certain, nothing dogmatic. Therefore Mr. Paul Rondelet had trained himself not only to look with a tolerant contempt, because some form of religion is good for common people, on the reverent crowds pouring in and out of the sanctuaries, but also to regard with scorn the blatant prophets of Atheism who bawl their intolerance on Sundays across the wilds of Hampstead Heath and Clapham Common. This naturally led among all the members of his set to their looking upon one who, being actually an Oxford man—had he been of Cambridge it would have been more possible, but equally degrading—had taken upon him Holy Orders with a bitterness of loathing and wonder which surpassed everything. It was, therefore, a situation full of irony that he should find himself compelled to become that hated thing, a clerical Fellow, or to lose, at one fell swoop, the whole of his income.

In three months his fellowship would come to an end. He felt like Dr. Faustus when he was approaching the last few days of his last year. Worse than any devil to Mr. Paul Rondelet was the Red Spectre of Poverty.

And to his school some kind of magnificence in living is absolutely essential.

That was easily obtained at Oxford, where, as a fellow, he had rooms and other allowances. But out of it, away from those monastic groves, where was he to find the necessary belongings of the Higher Life?

There was an ignominy, too, about pecuniary difficulties. He had always talked of money as if he had no necessity of thinking about it, ignoring the exiguity of the paternal income; he had set a tone of contempt for money to two generations at least of undergraduates; he had steadily maintained that Art, of all kinds, was to be pursued for the sake of Art alone, and for no advantages of lucre which might follow the successful practice of Art; he had taught his disciples to contemplate serenely, like the disembodied Cicero, the struggles and rivalries of the lower classes. And after this, it would be

his lot—ah! hard and thankless lot!—to go down into the labour market with the rest, like a rustic at a statute fair, and wait to be asked what he could do and for what wage he would be hired.

What, indeed, could he do?

In reality the class of young men to which Mr. Paul Rondelet belonged possess a marketable value quite out of all proportion to their own opinion. They read, as I have said, all the reviews, particularly those written in the newest jargon. They criticise scornfully, from the loftiest platform, productions of the day written by men who toil and give their best, mindful as much of their audience as of their Art. Fortunately these lofty criticisms do not often get into print, for the class of Editors who love Prigs is very small. And when they essay to write, those friends of their set receive with amazement and disappointment the first fruits, which ought to be the brightest and best, of a genius which they have revered. Alas! the looked-for result turns out to be common thought wrapped in pretentious jargon, and, amid the boastful trappings of pretence, they

discern with difficulty a vein so slender that hardly it can be seen to glitter in the brightest sunshine. Vast, indeed, is the difference between performance and promise.

What had Paul Rondelet to offer?

There was in his desk a little portfolio full of manuscript poems—they looked very pretty, written in his small, clear, and carefully eccentric handwriting on the thick cream note-paper which he affected. He and his friends believed that they had in them the true ring of original genius. Would they sell, if they were bound up? He was fain to reply that they would not. It required an education to admire them, and the world was not yet ripe for such superior work. Among these was one, in especial, very dear to himself and his friends, called *Aspasia's Apology*. It was a sort of sequel or companion to a certain well-known and charming London lyric by Mr. Rossetti, and was even more realistic than the work of that master. Then there were a few sonnets which, though he loved to read them and his friends cuddled them, would, he felt, require so much toning down that their distinctive excellencies would be lost; and

there were some odes whose severe classicalism limited their popularity to a very small set. On the whole, the probable value of his copyright in these poems was small.

But he might write articles in the more advanced of the magazines. He had once—he remembered with what pains and labour—written an article for the *Contemporary*, which the editor had declined with thanks, and yet it was clothed in the very finest new English, quite equal to Mr. Pater in his highest flights, and expressed the innermost convictions of his school. He swore then that he would never write again, unless for an audience who should invite him in terms of abject request. He would wait till the whole world should thrill and yearn for his coming.

He might teach, take pupils, give lectures. But that meant self-assertion, bawling in the market-place, joining in the struggle of competition. How *could* he, Paul Rondelet, stoop to assert what everybody ought to know, that he was the greatest of modern teachers, the noblest and best of philosophic lecturers?

Would they give him something in the Government service? A Poor Law Commissionership, a Permanent Under Secretaryship, a Commissioner in Lunacy, any little thing of that sort would do, just to provide the necessaries of life, which include, of course, a modicum of fair claret. But how to get such a post? We are not yet arrived at that consummation of sound political economy when our rulers shall all be philosophers, and anxious only to appoint philosophers; we are as yet still in the gloomy stage of interest, influence, favouritism. It is still possible for men like Mr. Paul Rondelet to stay out in the cold. And Mr. Paul Rondelet possessed absolutely no interest at all.

He who works for pay is a servant. He who has no money must work for pay. Therefore Mr. Paul Rondelet was condemned to be a servant. And he had aspired in his foolish dream to independence.

And again, he was in debt. The burden of debt is generally borne by Oxford men with great composure. Some there are who, like Panurge, argue in favour of debt as a healthy condition of life: I will not repeat

their arguments, which are indeed somewhat threadbare by this time. The only argument worth quoting is that which asserts that without the stimulus of debt, the lazy man remaineth lazy. In Mr. Rondelet's case, debt was no stimulus at all, but only an irritant. This morning he had received, for instance, two or three most disagreeable letters from ungrateful people, whom he had long honoured with his custom, asking for money. Money indeed! And his fellowship to expire in three months.

These sad thoughts occurred to him after luncheon. The rest of the Monks and Sisters having gone about their monkish devices, he retired to the library with these missives, to think. He thought the thing over from every possible point of view.

And at last an inspiration came to him. The method of the House of Hapsburg. *Tu, felix Austria, nube.*

He could no longer remain in the dark library; he must think this over in the open. He sought the solitude of the mediæval garden, and sat down to see what he might make of this new thought.

It was better than writing for papers and magazines; better than painfully elaborating books—better than lecturing; better than anything. In the home of some woman—wealthy, young, beautiful, not insensible to the charms of the Higher Culture, open to ideas, willing to be led rather than wishing to lead, with a proper respect for one who had taken a First in History Schools—could such a woman be found, he might find shelter from the strife of humanity; might even forget that he was allied with that struggling and eager band at all.

Could such a woman be found? She was found: she was here; she was in his presence; she was walking in the garden; she was coming to meet him. Her name was Miranda Dalmeny. He sprang to his feet and felt as if he could hold out his arms to meet her, even as Adam met his blushing Eve. Ever since the news of Alan Dunlop's engagement, this idea had been floating vaguely through the mind of Mr. Rondelet. Now it assumed, all at once, the character of a resolution. He *would* marry the owner of Dalmeny Hall. Alan was out

of the way; there was no other rival; he would secure this heiress for himself.

Now Miranda was not an admirer of this Fellow of Lothian. On the contrary, she thought him conceited and did not like his airs.

"He will not join in our amusements," she said to Desdemona with a little bitterness. "It must be a great misfortune to be superior to the ordinary pleasures of mankind. He certainly neither sings nor dances, nor acts, nor talks well. All is sadness with him, as if with sorrow over one painful deficiency in Culture."

"It is the new manner, my dear," said Desdemona. "Just as some men about town affect to be *blasé* and worn out—fancy Lord Alwyne pretending to be worn out!—so the highly superior school affect to be governed by so lofty a standard of criticism as to be incapable of finding amusement or pleasure in any of the ordinary things. I do not like Mr. Rondelet. Rightly did we call him Brother Parolles — words, words, words."

"They must spoil the world a good deal

for themselves," said Miranda. "On that account they are very greatly to be pitied."

"Yes," replied the lady of experience. "They want men made for themselves; they want women made for themselves; they want to be appreciated at their own estimate of themselves, and they do *not* want to be asked to do anything to justify that estimate."

But Mr. Rondelet did not know of this conversation.

Miranda greeted him with her quiet smile, and sat beside him on the garden bench, which was by this time of the afternoon well within the shade of the great walnut-tree.

"I have been to-day to see Alan Dunlop's *fiancée*," she said. "Have you seen her?"

"Once." Mr. Rondelet shuddered. "She was shelling green peas in the porch, and I saw her deliberately eating a raw pod. Could one marry a person who is capable of eating raw pods?"

Miranda laughed. "Your delicacy," she said, "springs from ignorance. I believe the shells of green peas are sweet. Surely you used to think so when you were a boy."

"Ah!" sighed Mr. Rondelet; "I have

made it my constant endeavour, since I went up to Oxford, to forget *all* that one used to do or think as a boy. It would be terrible, indeed, to be forced to remember the dreadful things that one did in that stage of existence."

"Really! Was your boyhood, do you think, more—more repulsive than most?"

"No; not that." Mr. Rondelet shook his head. "Not that. Less so, I should think, because even at the tenderest age one had gleams and glimpses of better things. And one remembers despising other boys for their rough savage ways and clinging to the lower forms of life."

"Do you mean that when you sucked sweeties you dreamed of fine claret?"

This was the question by way of metaphor which Mr. Rondelet hardly expected.

"Scarcely," he murmured. "The imaginings of a boy take no concrete forms. Only one yearns from the very first after the Golden Age, which seems then so possible, and now so far off. What I mean is—Miss Dalmeny, I am sure *you* will understand me. I have watched for a long time the fine genius

of appreciative sympathy latent in your brain —what I mean is, that children of finer clay than their compeers are touched very early in life with that divine discontent which marks the soul of the Higher Culture."

"Really!" said Miranda. "You interest me, Mr. Rondelet. Do you say—a divine discontent?"

"Yes. All discontent is divine. Even that which leads to ambitious aims and elevates the grocer's son, by means of the Church, to the Episcopal Bench. That, too, which fires the blood of the rustic and impels him—it is a reminiscence of the great Aryan wave of emigration—to move westward; that which prompts the student to an examination of the things that are, and that which leads the scholar to despair of the things that are to be."

I believe he was quoting something he had read and remembered, but he said it slowly, as if it was his own.

"And you, Mr. Rondelet, despair of the—the things that are to be?"

"Not openly. Pray do not quote me. The Common Room of Lothian has not yet

pronounced all its views. We have resolved in silence upon many important topics. I should be doing, perhaps, incalculable mischief if I were prematurely to disclose to the world the views of the Lothian Common Room."

Miranda was staggered by so much modesty. Did he really believe that the world cared one farthing for the views of the Common Room of Lothian? He did; he really did.

"When one lives," he went on to say, his long fingers playing sadly over his smooth cheek, "in the centre of the Higher Thought, one is apt to forget how misapprehension may be wrought by a premature statement. The world waits for Oxford to speak. Oxford waits for Lothian."

He stopped short, as if for Miranda herself to complete the speech, by saying: "And Lothian waits for Rondelet."

Again Miranda was staggered. It was almost too much to think that she was actually conversing with one on whose utterances the world waited.

"You used to be a friend of Alan Dun-

lop's," she went on, after a pause, "when he was an undergraduate?"

"Yes." His finger went back to his cheek, while with the other hand he stuck into his eye the glass which *would* not remain there. "Yes, we were friends. Dunlop was a man of considerable insight, up to a certain point. Then he would go off in the direction of practical sociology. I, with a few others, remained faithful followers of our theory, and continued to work it out to its logical conclusions, so that we have now advanced to a point where as yet, I believe, we have—there are only two or three of us—no disciples at all. We stand on a level by ourselves. Alan is left far, very far behind us: we only may speak boldly to each other what from others we would fain hide."

Again the measured sentence seemed a quotation.

"That must be a very great thing," said Miranda, wondering what their new levels were like, with just a suspicion that they had something heretical to do with marriage, religion, philanthropy, and other good things.

"I can hardly," the Philosopher continued, "explain to you the conclusions—not theories, but irrefragable conclusions—of the newest school of Modern Philosophy. Suffice it to say, that as the religions of the world have all been proved to have been based on false historical foundations, so its social economy, resting on the family as the basis, is fatally unsound, and must, as a preliminary step, be entirely remodelled."

"Oh!" said Miranda, wondering whether this sort of talk was quite proper, "and Alan does not agree with you?"

"He did not follow us so far. He has probably never considered our present position. We—the more advanced set—chanced, after he left us, to discover that our previous maxims, many of them similar to those of the well-known philanthropic school, had to be reconsidered and finally abandoned. Alan, poor fellow, remains in the mire of philanthropy. We, on the higher levels, have arrived at the grand Law that the more desirable life is the life *per se*, the life of example to those who know how to read it, but of unconscious example: the life in which Art and

Culture have the chief—nay, the sole place; and in which the herd, the vulgar, low-bred, and offensive herd, are left to swill as swine, tended by each other, just as they please. If they choose to raise their eyes, they may see walking before them in sweetness and light the great examples of the age——"

"Yourselves?"

"Ourselves; always, you see, before their eyes. As for the ignorant and the vulgar, we let them alone. That is best for them. We neither help them, nor look at them, nor care about them. Those among them who are worthy will rise; those who are not will remain where they are, grovelling and wallowing in their sties like pigs. Do you not pity poor Alan Dunlop, Miss Dalmeny?"

"I think I do, indeed," she replied, but her thoughts were not his.

Then she lifted her head quickly.

"That is a strange view of life, Mr. Rondelet. I think I hardly follow you quite. Is it not selfish—rather selfish?"

"Quite selfish," he replied, delighted, and with a little flourish of the long fingers about

either side of his face. "Quite, quite selfish. That is the secret of the new Morals. That is what we desire to teach—the new virtue of Pure Selfishness. Every man must find out the Higher Life and live it, regardless of others, all to himself."

"All to himself," she murmured.

"Nay, not quite all," Mr. Rondelet interposed, with a little blush which became him mightily and made him for a moment look like one of the vulgar herd. "Not quite all. The perfect man lives with and for the perfect woman."

"Oh!" said Miranda, "I began to think you were more than human."

At this point Miranda, detecting a tendency on the part of Mr. Rondelet's left hand to leave his cheek, over the smooth surface of which his long white fingers had been delicately wandering, and move downwards in the direction of her own hand, got up from the garden-bench and began to walk across the grass. He rose and followed her.

"Indeed," he said, "that is not so. We aim at being more perfectly human than the

rest. Our lives should be two-fold—it is, of course, an absurdity to speak of married people being one. The only difficulty with us"—here he sighed and became plaintive—"is that of finding the fittest mate."

"That, indeed," said Miranda, "would be difficult. For, suppose you found the fittest mate, how would you persuade her that you really belonged—for, I suppose she would have to be as selfish as yourselves—that you really belonged to your high levels. Of course you would not expect in a purely selfish person anything like faith or imagination. I am afraid you would have to descend a little from your height."

"By conversation——" he began.

"Talk is deceptive. I think you must first do something. You would have to demonstrate your superiority by writing, preaching, or teaching. Till then, Mr. Rondelet," —she sprang quickly up the steps which led to the terrace—"till then I fear your life will be one of lonely and unappreciated Selfishness."

She left him alone in the garden.

He was only half-satisfied with the conver-

sation. To be sure he had unfolded something of the new philosophy and allowed Miranda to guess at something of his purpose, but her manner of using the word Selfish lacked reverence. She spoke of Selfishness after the manner of the common herd. That was disheartening. On the other hand, she did give him advice, which always means taking a certain amount of interest. She advised him to do something.

Why not? He would write a paper which should at one stroke make him famous: he would write on the wretchedness of living at all under the conditions by which life is surrounded: he would show that life, with special reservations for men of his own school, is not worth having at all.

His imagination seized hold of the topic, he fancied Miranda reading it aloud, he fancied all the papers quoting it, he fancied the undergraduates looking at him as he walked down the High, he fancied the paper crammed with the deepest thought, wrapped in the most scholarly language, and flashing with epigram. Then he went hastily, his brain

afire, to look at the magazines, and choose the one most suited for his article. Cruel mockery of Fate! It was already done, in the *Nineteenth Century!*

END OF VOL. II.

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